NMP

#3
NOV.

MARGARET O'CONNELL

MAGGIE THOMPSON

RICHARD HOWELL

PAUL DINI

MURRAY WARD

DON THOMPSON

TOM LINEHAN

CHUCK HUBER

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On Comics Opinion and Comics Review

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"The Handicapped in Comics" by Murray Ward

"An Interview with Russ Cochran"

"Growing Up with Uncle Scrooge" by Paul Dini

Timely's **VENUS**

And a comic-strip parody of **"Flash Gordon"**

"The Super-Hero as Vigilante" by Chuck Huber and Doug Martin

NMPS

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Fandom's Forum

#3 NOV.

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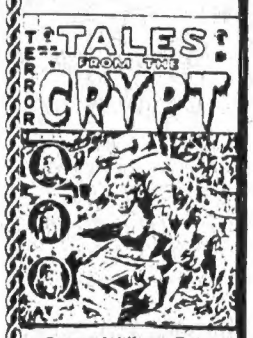

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LOC is published monthly by New Media Publishing, Inc., 12345 Starkey, Largo FL 33543. Controlled circulation pending at Boston MA. POSTMASTER: send address changes to LOC editorial offices, 127 Mount Auburn St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

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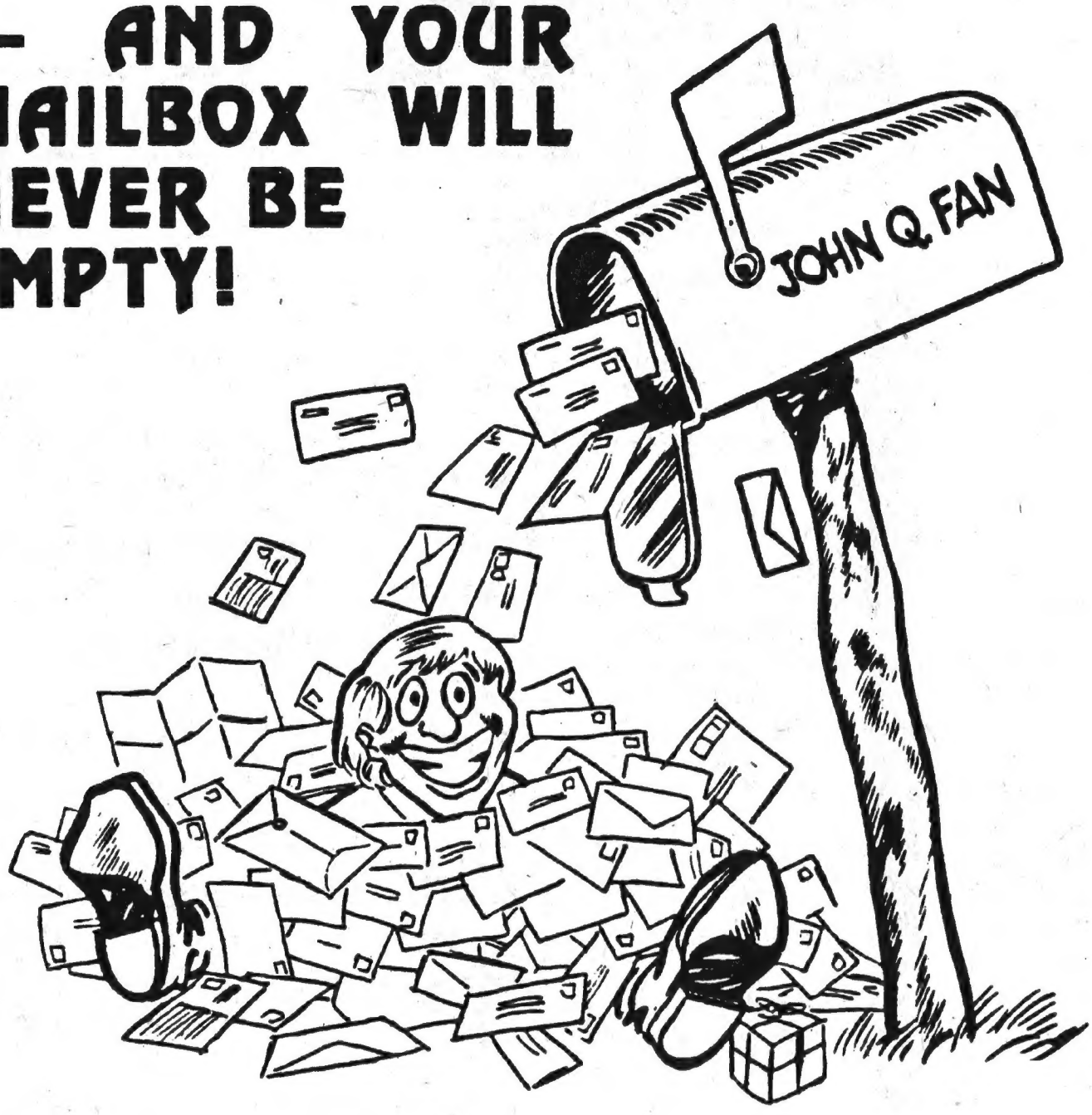

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LINES OF COMMUNICATION

EDITORIAL by BOB SORON

Hello; this is the soon-to-be-editor speaking. I'm Bob Soron, an NMP staffer since last November or so. Richard and Carol have gotten to be busy enough that they needed a little less deadline pressure, and, well... I was in the office that day, so...

You needn't worry about the future of **LOC**, though. Our policy is that if you readers don't like something, tell us and we'll work on improving or changing it.

For instance, we've heard that there isn't enough art in the magazine. Well, we've fixed that. Tom Linehan contributes a parody of the **FLASH GORDON** movie. You can expect to see Tom's parody strips here frequently.

And then, Richard Howell kicks off his new feature—reviews of esoteric characters or groups—this issue with **"Venus."** Rich's next feature will explain—hold onto your seats—**"The Space Canine Patrol Agents."** If **that** doesn't give you a reason to survive the next couple months, nothing will.

And next issue, Mark Marderosian will join our distinguished art staff. Mark's a fan of humor comics, especially the good ones, and this shows up in his art. But he can draw the regular stuff, too—and he can even mix the two without it looking strange. We have no doubt that you'll be as impressed by his work as we were.

You also wanted more letters. Well, that's up to you folks. If you write 'em, and they're interesting, we'll print 'em. But we've all agreed—a long letter column should be one of the mainstays of the magazine. Don't let us—or the other readers—down.

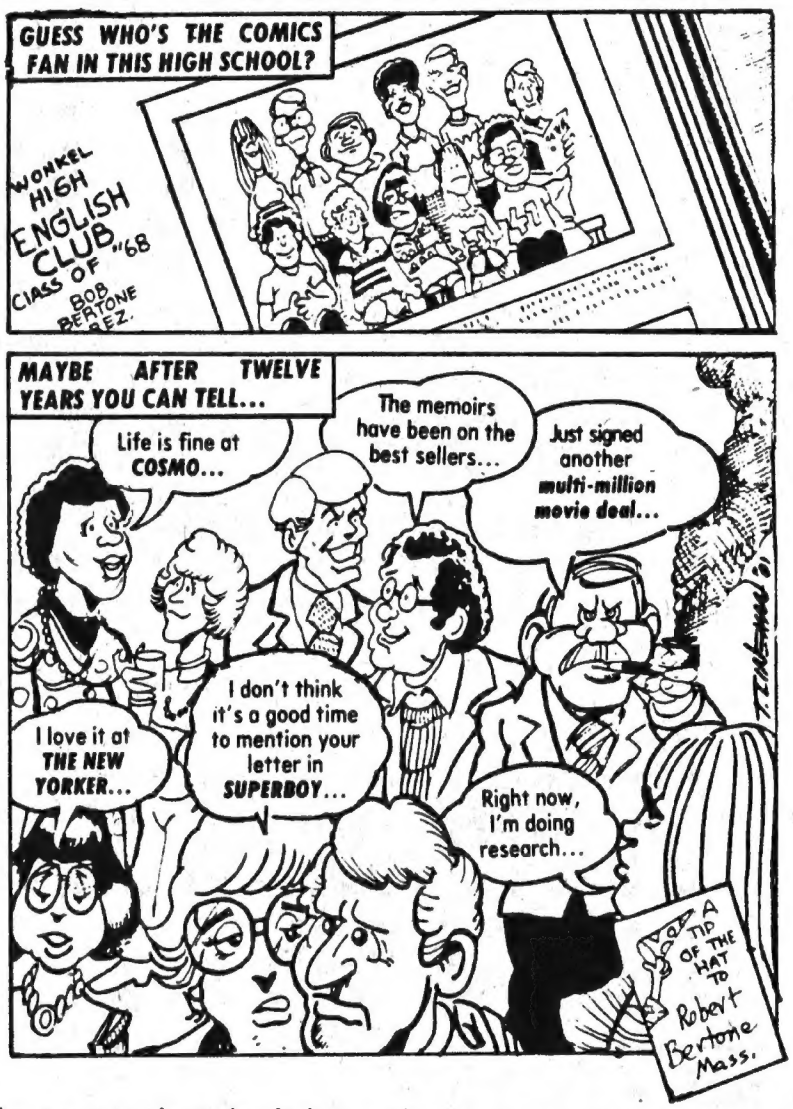
Of course, just because we're looking for a long letter column doesn't mean that we don't want articles. If you have anything you want to say in an article rather than in a letter, give us a try. "You don't have to be famous to be interesting" is what we say here. [Heck, we say it all the time!]

Nor do we want to scare off potential artists. As you've read, we're particularly interested in art at this time. Drop us a note to see what we need.

And, if you don't want to write articles or long letters or draw illos or strips, you can still have a stake in the magazine. Drop us a line and suggest ideas for the various features. Is there an article that you'd like to see, but don't have the resources to research on your own? Has this great cartoon been floating around in your head—and you can't draw? [I can sympathize with that one...] Get in touch. We're open.

If it seems we're happy with the response **LOC**

LETTERHACK'S NIGHTMARE #7


GUESS WHO'S THE COMICS FAN IN THIS HIGH SCHOOL?
WONKEL HIGH ENGLISH CLUB, '68 CLASS OF
BOB BERTONE REZ.
MAYBE AFTER TWELVE YEARS YOU CAN TELL...
Life is fine at COSMO...
The memoirs have been on the best sellers...
Just signed another multi-million movie deal...
I don't think it's a good time to mention your letter in SUPERBOY...
I love it at THE NEW YORKER...
Right now, I'm doing research...
A TIP OF THE HAT TO Robert Bertone Mass.

has been getting, you're right. There was a little doubt in at least my mind that fans were so interested in communication. [Needless to say, I'm glad to be proven wrong.]

Now, wait. This isn't going to turn into gratuitous self-gratification. But the magazine is an example. It could not be successful if people were not interested in it.

Marvel and DC have little room in their letter columns for discussion. And these, frequently, are a bit superficial. That is not the fault of the companies, however. In that little room, in which two to five letters are generally printed, who can analyze a story for its flaws—or virtues—past the most superficial level?

It seems that we fans want more. We seem to be tired of "Goshwow, that was great," or "Phew, what a bag of limburger." There is a lot of material out there, increasing every month, and we want to treat it as something worth treating.

It hasn't been limited to reviews of single issues, either. Series are examined; writers' and artists' work is discussed. Nor, of course, is it limited to this magazine. Commentary magazines have been flourishing. In fact, it looks as if we [*gasp*] have a **trend** here.

And it's about time. I came into fandom in the early 1970s, just as fandom was making the transition from ditto to offset, from fanzines to portfolios. There were precious few outlets for folks who just wanted to **talk** about comics, without worrying about when somebody's latest set of over-priced black-and-white sketches would be released or who was allegedly shafting whom that month. Articles like "Marvel vs. DC: Which Is Better?" were still appearing.

A lot of the people who **were** interested in communication vanished into the amateur publishing alliances. Apas have provided a ready, continuing means of communication with built-in provisions for feedback. One bi-monthly apa—**Interlac**, which focused on **"The Legion of Super-Heroes"** [though not exclusively], managed a long string of mailings of up to 700 pages, contributed by just 50 members, each of whom only had to contribute four pages every six months. The desire for communication has been kept alive, and it is finally resurfacing.

Maybe now it's a new audience. I don't think that's **entirely** true—many of the people who have written for these three issues have been around in fandom for some time. But many of us, I'm sure, **are** fairly new to fandom. I get that feeling because a lot of books which older fans tend to look down on—a sort of "nothing is as good as it used to be" reaction—are considered among the high points of today's comics by many others. Different groups have different preferences and different standards.

That probably contributes to the increased desire for communication. Each group wants to share its likes and dislikes with the other groups. And groups seem to be paying attention to each other. Note the increased interest in people like Kurt Schaffenberger, Cary Bates, and Don Heck. One probably wouldn't think of these people as having substantial fan followings. Perhaps, at this point, their followings are not substantial—but they are growing. Likewise, older groups are not ignoring the work of relative newcomers to comics—Frank Miller has been widely and deservedly praised, as have many writers and artists at both companies. There are still people who are turning out fine work and not being noticed, too.

That's good to see. The open-mindedness of fans, combining with the stronger desire for communication, is waking everybody up to work they may have missed otherwise. Even if you **are** one of those jaded people who feels nothing is as good as it used to be—you must admit that fandom is entering a renaissance. Let's enjoy it while we can.

A WORD FROM THE OLD EDITOR

I'd like to apologize to any of you out there who, having already read our last issue's exciting **"Coming Next Issue"** section [and having been thrilled beyond belief at the concept of **those** writers expounding on **those** subjects], bought this issue as soon as you saw it on the shelves—only to discover that some of the articles promised were not in the long-desired package. Well, there's a reason for that, and you should know about it. Everybody who buys **LOC** should know about it, whether they were disappointed by this issue's contents or not [and we're not, particularly]. The reason is that **LOC** is much more loosely-scheduled than any of our other magazines. Its editorial policy is to let our writers [and letter-writers, of course] discuss the issues and concerns which most interest **them**. As far as that goes, we've been surprised a few times by contributors who promised us one article, got very caught up in some other subject, and delivered a quite different essay at deadline time. Inasmuch as the latter subject seemed to have inspired a much stronger, more immediately heartfelt article, we'd be fools to object to the process. We think our readers profit from our laxness in this area.

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EVERY TIME
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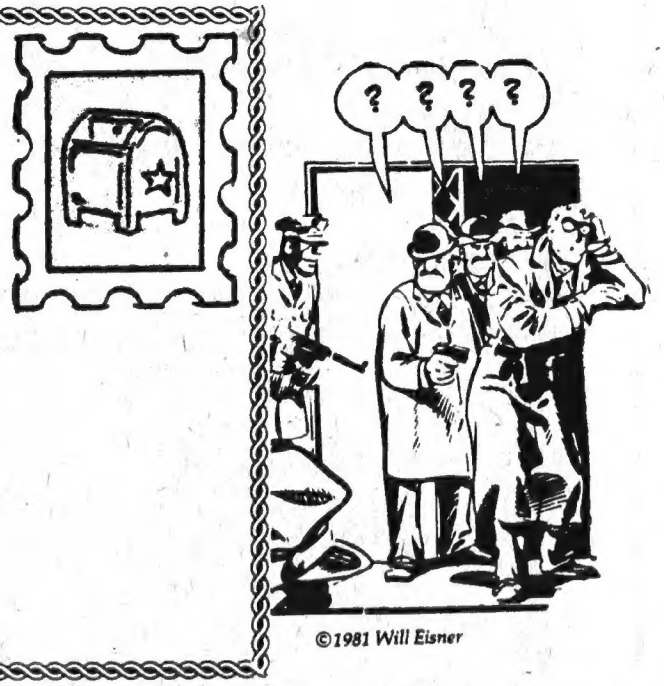
THE BEST SCRIPTS
ALL WITH ONE THING
IN COMMON:

ADVENTURE!

Chuck Huber is a graduate of the University of Illinois with a B.A. in Chemistry. He has also attended the MIT Ph.D. program.

Doug Martin is a lawyer in private practice. He is a graduate of the University of Illinois, both undergraduate and Law degree.



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SUPER-HEROES, VIGILANTES, AND THE LAW

by Chuck Huber and Doug Martin

Comic books, like all other forms of fantasy, obey the Weak Axiom of Reality: "Everything in a fantasy world is assumed to be the same as in the real world, until proven otherwise." One may be able to suspend disbelief and accept that gamma rays cause greenness rather than death in living organisms, or yellow sunlight enables Kryptonian tissue paper to withstand H-bombs, but the reader implicitly assumes that—in general—dropped rocks fall to the ground, unlike charges attract, etc., etc. There has to be some touchstone of reference to reality, both so that the reader will accept the overall fantasy, and so that the writer doesn't have to imagine every aspect of the story afresh.

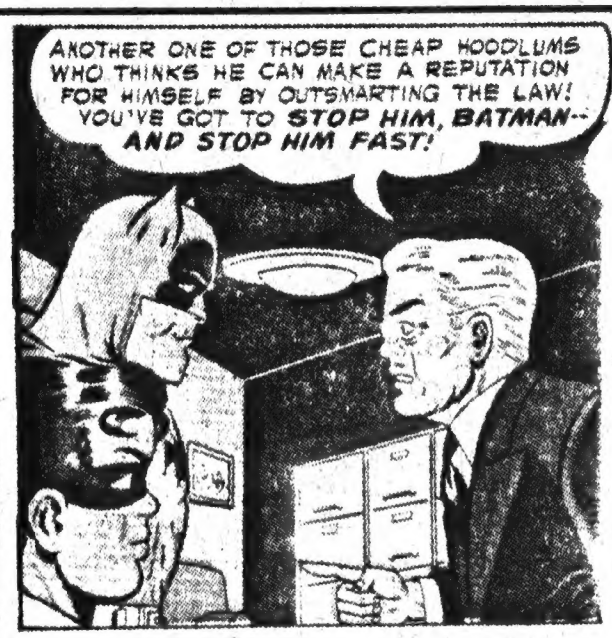
The same is true of social science as much as it is of hard science. Some stories **are** set in alien societies about which the writer has to set up an entire background. But most comics stories, at least of the super-heroic variety, are set on Earth, more specifically in 20th century America. Generally, the background details are a mixture of the real—Washington, D.C., is the capitol of the United States, even in Marvel Comics—and the fictitious—the cities of Metropolis, Central City; Senators Kelly, Hawk, and their appointed interim colleagues, Perry White and Bruce Wayne. So one would assume that the America of the various comics universes has a Constitution and legal code substantially similar to that of America in the real world. But the **real** Constitution and **real** laws were not written for super-heroes. This article hopes to explore how super-heroes could or could not operate under the real legal systems, and then to deduce, from the way things appear to work in the comics, the alterations in legal structure which must have occurred to make such activities possible.

Consider a typical super-heroic situation: Captain Colorful is out on patrol, swooping over the streets of Megalopolis. Suddenly, he senses Evil below him! Those arch-villains, Dr. Nefarious and The Flea, are breaking into the Seventeenth National Bank, abetted by a squad of thugs and lowlives. Captain Colorful dives to the attack! With one mighty punch, he knocks The Flea through the front of a nearby delicatessen, scattering cold cuts hither and yon. Moving swiftly, he rounds up the thugs and lowlives with contemptuous ease. But Dr. Nefarious has slipped away in the confusion!

Grabbing The Flea, the good Captain demands to know where Dr. Nefarious' hideout is. The Flea refuses to talk—but a few dizzying airplane spins later, he is ready to spill everything he knows, not to mention everything he had for lunch. Captain Colorful ties up The Flea and all the thugs, and, over their loud protests, hauls them off to the nearest police station. Then, acting on The Flea's information, he zooms off in search of Dr. Nefarious. The Flea told the truth: upon arrival, our hero spies the evil doctor through a window, as the doctor is gloating over his loot. Captain Colorful crashes in through the wall, and after a pitched battle, kayoes his arch-nemesis. Shortly thereafter, the villains are brought to trial, and, on the basis of the famous hero's testimony, they are convicted. Dr. Nefarious is sent to the state pen, while the super-powerful Flea is turned over to Captain Colorful for imprisonment in the Captain's tropical island fortress. End of story. . .

But in fact, in the real world, the above sequence of events **could not** have taken place as described—not because flying, super-strong humans are impossible, but because of the way the law works. Some of the events could have occurred, but not in combination with others of the events. Which of the events could have taken place depends on which of the two possible legal bases for a super-hero is being used.

The first possibility is that the super-hero is a duly recognized arm of some law enforcement agency. Batman would be a fairly typical example of this approach. As early as **BATMAN #7**, the Caped Crusader was said to have been an official deputy of the Gotham City Police Force.The concept of a person with specially-delegated police authority is not unknown in the real world. Many cities have "transit police" who are employees of the local mass transit district, charged with patrolling the subways, buses


ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE CHEAP HOODLUMS WHO THINKS HE CAN MAKE A REPUTATION FOR HIMSELF BY OUTSMARTING THE LAW! YOU'VE GOT TO STOP HIM, BATMAN-- AND STOP HIM FAST!
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Commissioner Gordon and Batman: "...a duly recognized arm of some law enforcement agency."

and trains. Some types of private security guards have limited police authority. This arrangement would have many advantages for the super-hero. His authority to intervene in crimes and pursue criminals would be confirmed, of course, and he presumably would receive assistance rather than opposition from the police department. But there are subtler benefits and liabilities as well. The hero would also be bound by all the constitutional restrictions that affect police.

For instance, search warrants would be required to enter a residence, and searches would have to be for a specified piece of evidence. The hero would be bound by Supreme Court rulings regarding admissability of evidence, especially confessions. When was the last time you saw Batman—or any other costumed character—read a suspect his rights? On the other hand, police have certain protections which would be useful for a super-hero. Police are not liable to civil suits for damages to persons or property in the line of duty. This includes damages to third-parties or "innocent bystanders." Given the vast quantity of property damage that often occurs when super-hero meets super-villain, such immunity is not trivial.

The other possibility is that the super-hero may function under his rights as an ordinary citizen under the rules of citizen's arrest. Presumably that's the capacity in which heroes such as Spider-Man function—those who are so frequently "on the outs" with the law themselves that they could hardly function as deputies. The rules dealing with citizen's arrest are fairly simple. Any citizen may apprehend a criminal **who is in the process of committing a felony**. That means that when Spider-Man happens on a crime in progress, say, Doc Ock stealing the Brooklyn Bridge, he is entirely within his rights to try to stop Octopus. But Spidey does **not** have the authority to track down escaped criminals who are in hiding —so long as they are not actively committing a felony, he can't touch them. In fact, in the little example given above, if Captain Colorful is not an officer of the law, his apprehension of Dr. Nefarious leaves him open to charges of breaking and entering, criminal trespass, criminal damage to property, and the ever-popular assault and battery.

Which brings up the other limitation on citizen's arrest: the "citizen" may use **only** enough force to stop the criminal from committing the felony or getting away. Any gratuitous application of fists, repulsor rays, or magic lassoes after the criminal has surrendered is strictly taboo, and would leave the hero wide open for lawsuits. In fact, the law states that a citizen performing an arrest may only detain the criminal at the scene of the crime until police arrive. Dragging the offender away to the police station is not permitted.

THE GUN'S SMASHED, KEY--AND SO IS YOUR LIFE!
I'M GOING TO IMPRISON YOU WHERE YOU'LL NEVER AGAIN THREATEN THE JUSTICE LEAGUE--OR ANYONE ELSE!
CRUNCH
BAH! I'LL FIND A WAY TO ESCAPE NO MATTER WHERE YOU PUT ME!
©1981 DC Comics Inc

Superman vs. The Key from *JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #63*: "...how does one imprison [a major super-villain] without taking drastic measures?

A paradox of sorts is that the constitutional restrictions against illegal search and seizure do not apply to private citizens. Thus, Spider-Man, acting as a private citizen, might uncover evidence without a warrant. If the police happen upon the evidence in plain sight [where Spidey left it lying], the evidence could be used in court even though it would have been thrown out had the police had to dig it out themselves.

Regardless of the statutes under which our hypothetical super-hero chooses to operate, there is one other hitch which would bedevil any hero with a secret identity. It follows from one of the requirements of the Sixth Amendment: "In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right... to be confronted with the witnesses against him..." In practice, this means that the accused and his counsel must know **who** is testifying for the prosecution, among other reasons, so that the defense can try to unearth any aspects of the witness' background which would tend to make the jury doubt his testimony.

--THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH. WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
MY NAME IS...
THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY OF IVY TOWN IS CONDUCTING THE PROSECUTION OF A HARDENED CRIMINAL WHOSE ARREST WAS BROUGHT ABOUT BY THIS SIX-INCH HIGH MAN WHO IS EVEN NOW STANDING TO TELL THE TRUTH AS HE TAKES THE STAND!
HIS NAME? LET HIM TELL YOU HIMSELF -- BUT BE WARNED! THERE IS A MAN IN THE COURTROOM WHO POSSESSES THE POWER TO MAKE HIM FORGET EVERYTHING HE EVER KNEW ABOUT THE ATOM!
©1981 DC Comics Inc.

The Atom testifying in *JLA #19*: "In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right...to be confronted with the witnesses against him." Is this the case here?

Assume that Spider-Man is the sole witness to an attempted bank robbery. When he's called to testify, the defense has a number of interesting options: First, how does the prosecution prove that **this** fellow in a Spider-Man costume is the same one who was at the scene of the alleged crime? After all, **anyone** can wear a costume. Given Spider-Man's powers, it would probably not be too difficult to convince a jury that he was the real McCoy. [Though a truly inventive defense attorney might bring in Mysterio in his imitation Spidey get-up to demonstrate that the wall-crawler's powers need not be unique to Spider-Man...] Even if the jury believes that Spider-Man **is** Spider-Man, the defense attorney can still hammer on the question of **who** Spider-Man is. For all anyone knows, the man behind the mask might have some axe to grind against the defendant, or be otherwise untrustworthy. Even if the members of the jury are not devotees of the Daily Bugle editorial pages, the defense would still have a valid constitutional point.

Yet more constitutional fun arises from the provisions of the Eighth Amendment against cruel and unusual punishment. Most super-villains in the comics are treated pretty much as common criminals. But how does one imprison The Sandman without taking unusual measures? Does the government consider The Phantom Zone as the only reasonable means of dealing with Kryptonian criminals? How did Moira MacTaggert obtain custody of Magneto, Unus, The Blob, Mastermind and Dragonfly [**X-MEN #104**]? How did Project Pegasus obtain custody of Klaw, Solarr and Electro [**MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #57**]? How have heroes from Superman to The Challengers of the Unknown arbitrarily imprisoned arch-enemies from Luthor to Multi-Man?

These are the problems; what are the solutions? Most modern-day super-heroes seem to be the deputized variety. Batman has, in general, been depicted as quite close to Commissioner Gordon and the Gotham City Police Department [save for the occasional story such as the **"Death of Talia"** sequence when Batman gets framed for some crime]. Besides his deputization in **BATMAN #7**, the Caped Crusader used to regularly give lectures at the police academy in the 1950s, before he decided to concentrate on his "creature of the night" image. And, as far as we know, the Bat-Signal still sits atop the roof of police headquarters, even if it seldom gets used

SOME OF THE NEWSPAPERS CRY: "WHERE IS MOON KNIGHT?" WHILE OTHERS LAMENT: "SILVER AVENGER FEARED DEAD"...
...AND ALL THE WHILE THE GUTROTTEN BRUTALITY OF BUSHMAN AND HIS SOLDIERS SWIFTLY SQUEEZES THE CITY DRY.
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

The disappearance of Moon Knight. Someone must have been counting on him.

these days [doubtless a cutback on the department's utilities budget...]. Virtually all the DC heroes in the 1950s and early 1960s had a special relationship with their local police: Green Arrow answered to an Arrow-Signal in Star City, while Hawkman and Hawkgirl confided in Commissioner Emmett of Midway City, and The Martian Manhunter found his entire supporting cast for years at the Middletown P.D. While the Flash never obviously palled around with any specific members of the Central City police [doubtless lest they note his resemblance to their co-worker Barry Allen] the speedster always seemed welcome when he zipped into a precinct office with that day's load of malefactors.

Marvel has always had fewer traditional crimefighters, with only Daredevil and, more recently, Moon Knight falling into the mold pioneered by Batman. Actually, Moon Knight had seemed to be more the Spider-Man type [that is to say, one who operates on the fringes of the law, capturing criminals, but who leaves them behind for the law to find, rather than actively collaborating with the police], but in recent issues, such as **MK #10**, he seems to be well enough known that the public is upset when he isn't on the scene for a time. Power Man and Iron Fist apparently have some quasi-official status, judging from their close collaboration with D.A. Tower and Assistant D.A. Hao. Following the lead of Colleen Wing and Misty Knight, Mr. Rand and Mr. Cage may well have private detective licenses. Detectives have certain privileges [such as having confidential relationships with their clients] but detectives are not allowed to interfere in ongoing police investigations to any great degree—depending on the tolerance of the police involved. Clearly, there must be some further degree of sanction given to super-heroes in Marvel's New York.

The Spirit perhaps best exemplifies the situation which really allows most super-heroes to function. Time and again, Eisner suggested that the Spirit had an ambiguous image with the general public. They [and officers of the law outside Central City] were never sure which side of the law Denny Colt was on. But Commissioner Dolan and the cop on the beat knew where The Spirit stood, so The Spirit could function **de facto** if not **de jure**. So long as the local cops and other minions of justice consider the pursuit of "costumed vigilantes" to be a low priority item, the super-hero can function. No district attorney can be directly forced to prosecute if he doesn't want to —though public opinion might force the DA himself out of office for his decision.

Fortunately, most super-heroes and the general concept of super-heroing probably have pretty good public relations going for them. One must remember that an awful lot of super-heroing has nothing to do with the crusading against petty law-breaking we've been discussing. Superman spends far more time dealing with natural disasters of one sort or another

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The Spirit and Commissioner Dolan in their serio/comic treatment of the vigilante hero. "Eisner suggested that The Spirit had an ambiguous image with the general public."

than he does in nabbing bank robbers. Indeed, judging from the numbers of airliners Superman has rescued in mid-air over the years, the FAA on Earth-One probably feels obliged to suspend air traffic whenever Superman is known to be off-Earth. Similarly, The Fantastic Four, Green Lantern, Thor, and many more heroes primarily appear in public when dealing with natural catastrophes or cosmic menaces. Very few people are likely to object on constitutional grounds to being saved from typhoon, earthquake, Gordanian, or Kree. And so, the good public feeling extended to the more cosmic heroes would doubtless carry over to the more mundane super-heroes.

Even more crucial to the status of super-heroes in the Marvel and DC universes is the timing of their first appearance: during World War II. [Technicallly, of course, it's not clear how much super-heroic activity there was on Earth-One in the 1940s, but there was probably some.] According to the revisionist history **per** Roy Thomas, both worlds had extensive super-heroic activity during the war, and in both cases President Roosevelt saw the wisdom of organizing the super-heroes and enlisting them in the war effort. In the face of the Axis menace, the super-heroes were bound to get a good public reception—both for the actual help they could lend, and for their symbolic value as embodiments of American power and virtue. Moreover, under the wartime powers of the government, FDR could give The Invaders, Justice Society, Liberty Legion, All-Star Squadron, or what have you, virtually any degree of quasi-legal authority he desired. In fact, even as the United Nations grew out of the Atlantic Alliance, a case could be made that the beginnings of an international sta-

MOMENTS LATER, JEAN LORING FACES THE SPECIAL SESSIONS JUDGE...
I MOVE TO AMEND MY PLEA, FOR MY CLIENT THE JUSTICE LEAGUE NOT GUILTY ON THE GROUNDS THAT FOR EVIL THEIR ERROR WAS, THEY MAINTAIN THEIR INNOCENCE BUT HAVE NO WAY OF PROVING IT!
THE SUBMISSION MAY NOT BE WHAT THE COURT WANTS BUT IT'S THE BEST WE'VE GOT! THEY DESERVE A FAIR TRIAL!
THEY DESERVE TO ESCAPE?

Jean Loring's special plea in *JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #19.*

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tus for super-heroes grew out of the consultations of the British and American governments on the use of super-heroes (e.g. **GIANT-SIZE INVADERS #1**, and **DC SPECIAL #29 "Secret Origin of the Justice Society"**).

At war's end, the heroes were riding high. On Marvel-Earth, Harry Truman specifically asked the major heroes to continue their work after war's end (**WHAT IF? #4**), though The All-Winners Squad seemingly lasted only a year or two after the war—probably falling victim to the volatile temper of The Sub-Mariner. The Justice Society did rather better, going at least into the 1950s (**ALL-STAR #57**, March 1951), only to fall victim, according to the revisionist history of Paul Levitz, to McCarthyism (**ADVENTURE #466**). In the internal history of the two worlds, it makes sense that the government might have grown a little leery of super-heroes at that point. The need for them was no longer as obvious. Perhaps more importantly, the heroes who could not be forcibly restrained were vanishing from the scene: Dr. Fate, The Spectre, The Sub-Mariner, The Human Torch. When they were around, even government officials who distrusted them could see that it was better to co-opt them into quasi-legal status than to try to suppress super-heroics. By the mid-1950s, only the old stand-bys Superman and Wonder Woman acted on a scale that national authorities had to deal with. Batman and the other "costumed acrobats" had accomodations with the local police.

"BUT TO THE LIVING--
YOU MEAN--HE HAS SENT US A SIMPLE TELEGRAM!?
THAT'S IT, HAMOR! HE THANKS US, AND ASKS US TO STAY TOGETHER NOW THAT THE WAR'S OVER--
--TO HELP FIGHT CRIME-- AND THE BLACK MARKET BOYS.
WE'VE NEVER TURNED DOWN A PRESIDENTIAL REQUEST...

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A special presidential request to The All-Winners Squad. "At war's end, the heroes were riding high."

The Avengers are obviously the center of government-sanctioned super-heroics. As early as **AVENGERS #5**, Thunderbolt Ross refers to The Avengers having "A-1 Priority," while in the next issue, The Wasp obtains the aid of the imprisoned Paste-Pot Pete by invoking Avengers Priority (and his warden suggests that helping The Avengers was a good way to increase his chances of getting parole). Clearly Tony Stark moved swiftly to obtain government sanction for The Avengers, and the government realized that it was far better to have beings like Thor and Iron Man with them rather than against them. The most obvious example of government control over The Avengers came with the meddling of Henry Peter Gyrich in issue #181, but there were early occasions as well: Hawkeye was cleared by the "Federal Security Agency" when he joined in issue #16, and the City of New York obtained a court order to disband the group in #21. Overall, The Avengers are clearly whom Mr. and Ms. Average American think of when they think of super-heroes in the Marvel Universe. Avengers Priority seems to be a pretty thorough overriding privilege, enabling The Avengers as a group or as individuals to take charge from any US police or military authority. Unlike The JLA, The Avengers seem to have no official international jurisdiction, though they seem to be generally welcome around the world. In **AVENGERS ANNUAL #1**, Col. Nick Fury requests their aid in dealing with the machinations of The Mandarin, saying that "S.H.I.E.L.D. is an American combo." Perhaps this was merely to suggest that The Avengers could more easily act in an unofficial sense than S.H.I.E.L.D. could. Certainly there is an interesting legal tangle in the government of the United States granting official quasi-police powers to such diverse members as an android, a robot, a couple of demi-gods and the head of state of a foreign power!

The exact status of S.H.I.E.L.D. poses real problems, too. There are many indications that S.H.I.E.L.D. is indeed an "American combo." The Director of S.H.I.E.L.D., as well as apparently all his ranking agents [except the Contessa Valentina Allegro de Fontaine] are American citizens, though only Fury himself seems to hold an active commission in the military. On the other hand, there have been allusions to the British branch of S.H.I.E.L.D. [**AVENGERS #115** and the **"Captain Britain"** stories] and to the Canadian branch of S.H.I.E.L.D. [**INCREDIBLE HULK #180-1**, the first appearance of Wolverine]. Moreover, the S.H.I.E.L.D. helicarrier wanders over the world at will, even intruding on Soviet air-space on occasion [though with little welcome: **INCREDIBLE HULK #108, IRON MAN #119**]. Also, S.H.I.E.L.D.'s attempt to buy out Stark International in **IRON MAN #119-129** isn't anything that an ordinary government agency could get away with. Clearly, S.H.I.E.L.D.'s Congressional budget hearings must be a real barrel of laughs. I think Marvel's S.H.I.E.L.D. must be assumed to have the power, if not the sinister intent, of the conspiracy-theorists' version of the CIA.

The X-Men, too, have had a government connection since their earliest days. As explained in the **"Origins of the X-Men"** series [**X-MEN #38**], Professor Xavier sought out FBI agent Duncan to get support for his organization of "good" mutants. Though Agent Duncan was not much in evidence for a while after issue #2, he did show up after the "death" of Professor X to order the team to disperse across the country. Granted, The X-Men's patriotic fever only lasted two issues before they got back together, but it does suggest some sense of federal authority over The X-Men. It's not clear whether the same sort of relationship holds for The New X-Men. While they did have clearance to enter Valhalla Mountain in issues #94 and 95, one assumes that agent Duncan and his superiors would have sternly disapproved of the battle with Alpha Flight on Canadian territory. However, given that Professor X has never been shy about twiddling the memories of those who might be upset by his team's activities, Agent Duncan probably just nods vacantly in agreement whenever the good Professor suggests something. Certainly, the link between The X-Men and the federal government doesn't seem to have ever been publicized, unlike that with The Avengers, considering the continuing public distrust of mutantkind. It will be interesting to see whether Agent Duncan reappears should Messrs. Claremont and Cockrum choose to pursue the "Senator Kelly's Sentinels" subplot.

By the time the Second Heroic Age rolled around, the mechanisms for handling super-heroes were established, if a bit dusty from disuse. The preferred legal approach to super-heroes in both worlds seems to be to deputize them in groups. Early in their career, The Justice League was shown to have some kind of unique legal status. In **"Super-Exiles of Earth"** [**JLA #19**], ace lawyer Jean Loring managed to persuade a judge to accept a rather strange plea of **nolo contendere** under which The Justice League agreed to accept exile until they could be cleared of crimes committed by Dr. Destiny's dream-duplicates. In **"Case of the Forbidden Super-Powers"** [**JLA #28**], the United Nations issued an injunction against the use of super-powers. Ordinarily, the UN has no such authority over individuals, and such an injunction, even if it came from the World Court, would be considered an infringement on the sovereignty of the United States [not to mention that of Atlantis]. Clearly, The JLA by that point must have been operating under some kind of United Nations charter, granting them quasi-police powers within member nations, and in turn giving the UN some kind of ultimate authority over the League. The

--THE SMALLER, BOARDING CRAFT... WELL, JUST LISTEN!
ATTENTION, AVENGERS! THIS IS SHIELD, BRITISH DIVISION!
OPEN YOUR HATCH!
SHIELD ALWAYS TAKES THE MOST ABRASIVE APPROACH, BUT--
LET'S SEE WHAT THEY WANT!
HERE COMES SOMEBODY!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group
The sole American reference to the British S.H.I.E.L.D. branch (from *AVENGERS #115*).

status of The Doom Patrol and The Challengers of the Unknown was never made so clear. Since both groups at various times operated private aircraft in seeming disregard of the FAA and were consulted by governmental authorities on occasion, they probably received some kind of sanction from the U.S. government, though not so broad a charter as The Justice League. The status of The Blackhawks varied widely over the years, from their voluntary military unit approach during WWII, to being an organization of mercenaries in one of their 1970s revivals. At one point at least [**BLACKHAWK #228-241**], the team appeared to be under direct control of the government, and were ordered to become super-powered heroes by the agency called G.E.O.R.G.E. However, these issues are generally considered to be among the best arguments in comics for ignoring continuity and may be considered apocryphal. The status of The Teen Titans is also obscure: the old team seldom could be taken seriously enough to expect that the authorities treated them as much more than a useful kid gang and presumably the umbrella of The JLA's privileges

BUT WE'LL HAVE TO USE THEM! WE MUST FIND AND TRAIN AT LEAST THREE SPECIAL AGENTS... THE BEST!
THEY'LL HAVE TO BE THE BEST TO COPE WITH THE WARLORD!
... AND SO THE SEARCH BEGINS..

The beginning of The T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents, a super-group created, administered, and financed by "the government."

©1981 Tower Comics

partially extended over them. The new team hasn't been around long enough, or battled enough menaces publicly to call much attention to them. Still, the existence of an obvious headquarters, especially if Titans Tower was willed to The Titans as a group rather than specifically to Cyborg, would require that their legal status be defined in the near future.

An interesting footnote on the status of the Earth-One super-groups is the JLA charter devised by Mark Gruenwald in **AMAZING WORLD OF DC COMICS #14** [1977]. It supposedly received the sanction of Julius Schwartz and so might be considered official, though many of its provisions have been ignored in recent years. It defines in very limiting fashion that The JLA as a group or an individuals may not interfere in political affairs, international conflict, or routine police matters, and may not violate individual civil rights. It is evident that these provisions are used mainly as restraints, rather than being strictly enforced. If the Gotham City authorities chose to jump on The Batman for interfering in police business, they could do so under this charter, but obviously they **like** having him interfere, so the clause isn't exercised. Gruenwald's charter also suggests that the governments of the world are very aware of the existence and nature of the Guardians of the Universe and have tacitly accepted them as an interplanetary authority. In any case, there's no evidence in the **GREEN LANTERN** stories that Hal Jordan has been given any status by either the USA or the UN above and beyond that of his JLA membership.

On Marvel-Earth, as on the DC Earths, most super-heroes have some kind of connection with an organized body. The Fantastic Four have frequently been called in as super-powered consultants on numerous occasions, beginning with the Mole Man's doings on Monster Isle in **FF #1**, through the return of Galactus in **FF #121-3**. But by and large, The FF has been treated as a private corporation deriving its support from Reed Richards' patent royalties. Clearly The FF has to receive some sort of special treatment from the City of New York and from the US government or they would have been long ago hauled away for being hazards to the general public.

There are a number of other possible ramifications of government support of super-heroes that can be guessed at. The heroes with official sanction almost certainly obtain the same immunity from civil suits which is extended to police for damages in the line of duty. Quite probably, the government has some sort of fund set up to cover civilian damages from the activities of super-beings, or perhaps the IRS allows Tony Stark and Bruce Wayne to take tax deductions for money paid out in the name of The Avengers or The JLA. Probably, some of the cities with super-heroes in residence pass special ordinances to encourage the heroes to hang around. In one story, Gotham City passed an ordinance making it illegal for anyone other than The Batman to wear his distinctive costume—rather akin to laws against impersonating an officer. New York probably caters to the Avengers and the FF, at least, and Metropolis certainly obliges Superman... to what little extent he needs it.

No amount of official sanction or deputized powers can get around the Sixth Amendment restrictions on witnesses with "secret identities." It is conceivable that a sufficiently broadminded Supreme Court could rule that the well-known, established heroes are public enough figures in their own right that there is no need to know their true identities. Perhaps here a distinction which exists between the Marvel and DC versions of American jurisprudence. The Batman has been shown testifying at a number of criminal cases [e.g. **DETECTIVE #225, "The Invisible Batman"**], as has Superman [**SUPERMAN #176, "Superman's Day of Truth"**] and even The Atom [**JLA #14, "Menace of the Atom Bomb"**]. On the other hand, I can't recall a single example of a Marvel hero testifying at an ordinary criminal trial

(not counting such anomalies as the trial of The Hulk, **INCREDIBLE HULK #152-3** or the trial of The Falcon, **CAPTAIN AMERICA #188**). For example, in the trial of The Leapfrog (**DAREDEVIL #27**), the Man Without Fear didn't show up to testify, partially because he was too busy as defense lawyer, Matt Murdock. I may well have forgotten some example—I trust the readers of **LOC** will enlighten me if I have. Of course not every DC hero feels bound to comply with such established procedures for criminal apprehension and punishment. The Reisher Spectre, for example, despite being officer of the law Jim Corrigan, never bothered with such trivialities. One has to wonder why Corrigan's superiors didn't throw him

WE'LL SUPPLY YOU WITH THE INFO WE HAVE---AND YOU REPORT AT INTERVALS TO US!*
EXCELLENT, AGENT DUNCAN! I'LL KEEP IN TOUCH REGARDING MY PROGRESS!
LET US HOPE WE HAVE BOTH REASONED CORRECTLY!
ON US MAY DEPEND THE SURVIVAL OF ALL HUMANITY!
*AS SEEN IN ISH #2! --SET-THE-RECORD-STRAIGHT STAN.
NEXT ISH: The ORIGIN of...CYCLOPS!
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From the *"Origins of The X-Men"* series (beginning in *X-MEN #38*), Professor Xavier and Agent Duncan. The early governmental connection between these two "...does suggest some sense of federal authority over The X-Men."

off the force, inasmuch as every time he was assigned to a case, he had to end up reporting that the suspects had vanished without a trace!

The notion of government-sponsored heroes gets taken a step farther with those heroes who are directly working for, or even were created by the government itself. This category includes the attempted S.H.I.E.L.D. Super-Agents, the super-beings (such as the new Golden Guardian) who were generated by Kirby's DNA Project, the various T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents, and, most recently, Canada's Alpha Flight. The Canadian government is in a much easier legal position than the United States government to do such things. Canada, like Great Britain, has no written Bill of Rights—every question of individual rights is under the direct control of the legislature. Thus, if Prime Minister Trudeau could swing it in Parliament, Alpha Flight could be given whatever authority he desired it to have. Certainly the rebuilding of Wolverine into an adamantium-clawed killing machine is going further than the US government ever did. It is not clear, since the subject hasn't been treated much in the comics, but I suspect that civil libertarians would get more apprehensive over the deliberate creation of "super-police" by the government than by the simple granting of recognition to super-beings who sprang up more or less on their own.

One area in which the Marvel and DC equivalents of the ACLU have apparently conceded the field to pragmatism is in regard to the treatment of super-villains. The examples of imprisonment of super-villains cited at the beginning of the article are only the tip of the iceberg. Both major universes seem to have some standard prisons designed for super-villains, most prominently Ryker's Island at Marvel and the Arkham Asylum at DC. But many villains still end up being locked away in extremely unorthodox fashion. So far as I know, the only story to touch on this question appeared in **JLA #169-170 "The Doomsday Decision."** In this Gerry Conway tale, five Leaguers were hauled before a special UN tribunal and charged with unlawfully depriving the super-being Ultraa of his rights without due process. The story makes it clear that the heroes are guilty as charged. However, Ultraa's attorney turns out to be a malevolent alien... and so the trial broke down into the inevitable fight scene and the question was never resolved.

Beyond the possible fun of just cataloguing all these examples of the legal status of super-heroing, there is a point to the discussion which is illustrated by the example of the JLA story. There is potential for interesting stories in an exploration of the real relationship between super-heroes and the law they allegedly defend. Some exploration of this has been done over the years, mainly in the interaction between various heroes and the actual police and prosecutors they run into. The series where the most recent work in this area has occurred is also the book where it is most natural: **DAREDEVIL**. The lawyer-hero has done considerable thinking about his attitude toward his foes, and his personal standards of law and justice, in the recent Bullseye and Gladiator subplots. I hope and expect that the unpublished DD/Punisher "drug" story touches on the legal and moral differences between a character who operates within the law and one who goes outside it. Just as there is no reason why comics writers could not extrapolate from real science to provide interesting and instructive plot devices, there is also no reason why comics should not extrapolate from the real world of legal restrictions and individual rights to the alternate reality of super-menaces and the super-vigilantes who deal with them.

Venus

by Richard Howell

The goddess of love herself descended onto the world of mortals in the August of 1948. Being a goddess, she was granted her own magazine from the very first, in which she fought various malignant fiends and evil deities—all in the name of love

The word "fought" is used somewhat inaccurately, because Venus rarely **fought** anybody or anything. In those early issues, she **withstood**, then called upon Jupiter and friends to intercede for her.

Loki

A recurring antagonist was **Loki, God of Evil** [horned and fanged], who went on to bigger and better roles—thanks to family connections.

Venus quelled rebellions, stopped alien invasions, and interfered in peoples' love lives, for about twelve issues. Those issues could conceivably have been the inspiration for the modern **DOORWAY INTO NIGHTMARE** series.

Venus is ©1981 Marvel Comics Group

The Troll Queen from *VENUS #13*

The real fun began in issue **#13**, in which Venus' tediously cosmic [?] adventures were taken over by writer/artist **Bill Everett**, one of comics' all-time great artists, and one of the industry's champion eccentrics as well. The Goddess of Love's exploits got much weirder **much** faster.

Venus' super-powers, such as they were, vanished under Everett, but what his Venus lacked in supernatural abilities, he compensated for in grit. Venus no longer called on the gods for help, but instead took matters into her own hands, even if it meant downing a villain by a flying tackle.

ONE MOVE OUT OF YOU, HAMMOND, AND I'LL *SNIP* YOUR GIRLFRIEND RIGHT IN TWO!!!
OH, NO YOU WON'T, MR. WISE GUY! I'LL ROLL MYSELF INTO A SPITBALL AND FLY INTO YOUR EYE!

The day Venus became a paper doll, from *"The Day Venus Vanished."*

ALL RIGHT, YOU BIG, FAT, COP! I'VE NEVER GIVEN YOU A BUM STEER BEFORE, HAVE I? OKAY--SO NOW I'M OFF MY ROCKER! GO BACK TO YOUR OVERSTUFFED DESK CHAIR IN YOUR COZY LITTLE HEADQUARTERS, AND READ YOUR COMIC BOOKS! I'LL HANDLE THIS MY OWN WAY!!!

Venus tells off a disbelieving policeman in *VENUS #16.*

Everett's Venus also displayed a new personality. She took no guff from anyone, and gave quite a bit. [When her series ended, she probably struck her cane on the ground and became **Sgt. Fury.**]

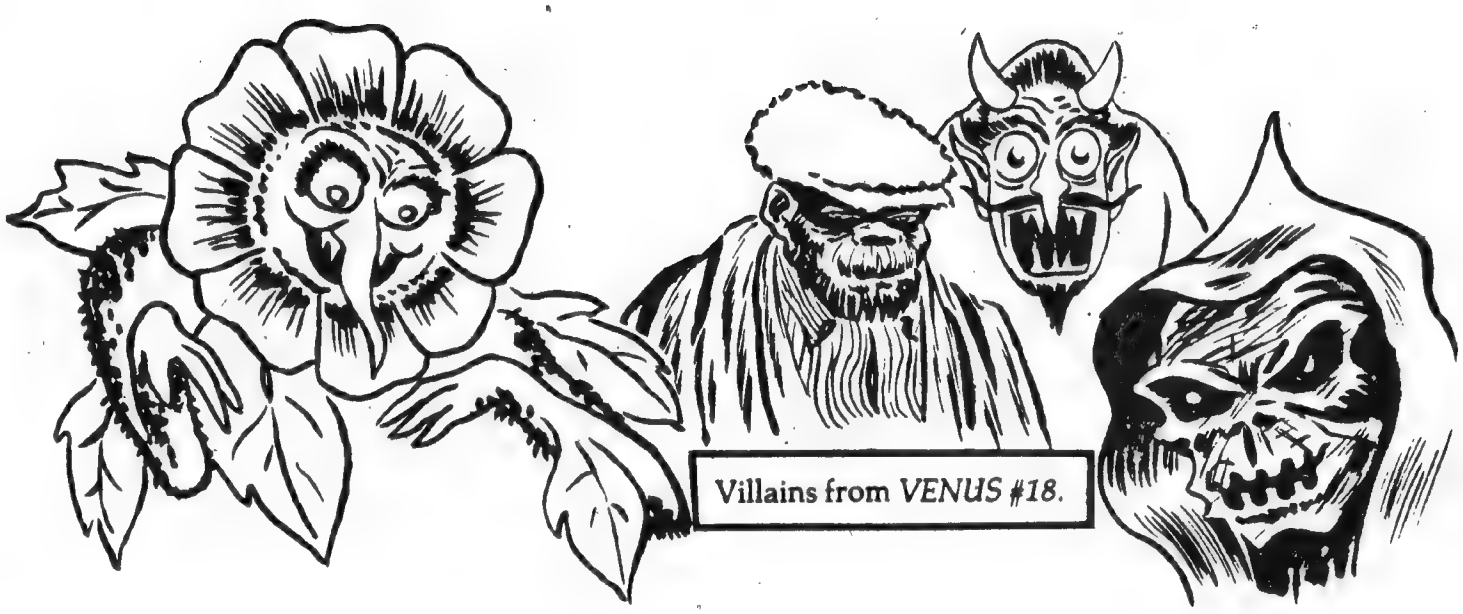
A "typical" **"Venus"** adventure is represented by **"Where Gargoyles Dwell"** in **VENUS #16**. The plot involves Venus' trip to the Greycar building, thirteenth floor. Although the elevator operator informs the demurely-clad goddess-in-mufti that there **is** no thirteenth floor, Venus walks up the stairs to her floor [yes, there was one] and finds broken chairs, windows, desks, and bodies. She also encounters Gara, king of the gargoyles who—along with the rest of his race of killer gargoyles—is posing as a common office gargoyle. Venus helps the sole living 13th floor-er escape [shattering a gargoyle or two with a fire axe in the process] and reports the incident to the police.

The police don't believe her, of course, and when they investigate, they find the building's floor numbers progress from #12 to #14—with **no #13!!** The sergeant asks Venus what she's been snorting, and she tells him off [see previous page]. That night, Venus, clad in a pure white evening gown—climbs up the elevator cables to floor #13. [Why she needed an evening gown to do so was not explained.] The oil-stained immortal discovered **Sylvia Corpo**, a deranged young woman who claimed to be Queen of the Gargoyles, and the person who gave life to the stone images [including that "double-crosser, Gara"].

There's no explanation of the process. Sylvia attempts to kill Venus. Gara and friends awaken and chase Sylvia down the hall, and they all plunge down the elevator shaft and die. When the police investigate the **next** time, they find a dead body, a bunch of broken gargoyles, Venus [safe], and Venus' purse and gloves wedged in between floors #12 and #14.

BUT GARA DIDN'T WANT ME TO BE HIS QUEEN--SO HE TRIED TO KILL ME! JUST AS I'M GOING TO KILL YOU NOW!
SO! YOU SHOULDN'T'VE TURNED YOUR BACK! I'VE GOT YOU NOW!!!
LOOK OUT— BEHIND YOU!

The story is, well, strange—roughly on the level of logic of an acid trip—full of vivid, fabulous imagery which seems to possess an **internal** logic, albeit a rather impenetrable one. At story's end, Venus, still covered with oil and once again unable to locate floor #13, enjoins the reader: "Can **you** explain it? I can't! Now g'wan home! I need some sleep!" [And a new evening gown, doubtless.]



Villains from *VENUS #18.*

Obviously, the villains in the **"Venus"** stories would have to be weird, too. In one issue alone (#18), Everett featured his heroine's battles with Old Joe and **"The Sealed Specters"** [a misanthropic handyman and the underground monsters to whom he had promised body-switches with normal humans], the killer flower people of **"The Mad Mountain"** [**no** explanation], and Neptunia, insane daughter of Neptune, an odd cross between Katharine Hepburn and The Sub-Mariner.

The Venus character returned in Marvel Comics, the heir to the Timely/Atlas characters, yet modern audiences still have not seen the iconoclastic goddess of love in her full 1950s glory. She appeared to be rather restrained in **SUB-MARINER #57** [in which she evidenced little of her old fire], and the "Venus" who appeared in **THE CHAMPIONS #1-3** seemed to have been based on the more traditional, pre-Everett version of the character.

It's not clear why today's heroine-mad comics writers and fans wouldn't want to revive a character so vibrant and unique—and keep her intact. Probably Bill Everett's trademarked "gonzo black humor with cheesecake" approach is beyond the grasp [or maybe comprehension] of many readers, and would certainly find some problems fitting into the Marvel Universe. Venus, though, remains an original—and a valuable part of comics' heritage.

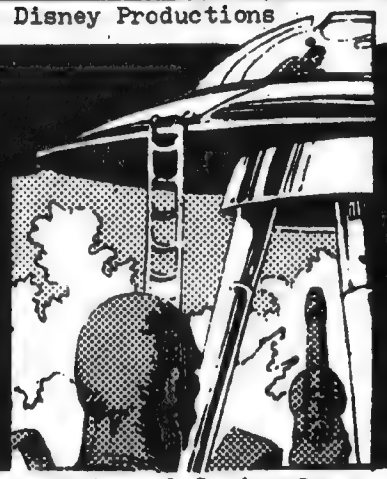
Venus
GODDESS OF LOVE
CHEW ON SOME LOVE POWER, YA CREEP!
BONK!
HOLY MOLEY! SHE'S THROWING HEART-SHAPED BOXES OF VALENTINE CANDY!
Richard Howell '79

Artist's conception of a meeting between Everett's Venus and the Marvel Universe.

peter pan

©1980 Walt Disney Productions

H.G. WELLS



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DR. WHO

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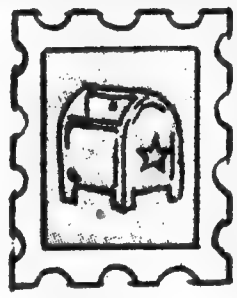
by Margaret O'Connell

Margaret O'Connell is a student in Comparative Literature at Princeton Graduate School.



HELPFUL HINTS FOR MARRIAGE-MINDED SCRIPTERS

As discussed in last issue's column, the fact that comics writers tend to either shy away from or only partially succeed in portraying as protagonists male and female partners who are clearly committed to each other romantically as well as professionally inevitably suggests that a male-female partnership which is even-handed in every way is impossible.

What can be done about eliminating this worrisome imbalance in the presentation of male/female teams, and how should comics scripters go about doing it? Perhaps some useful strategies might be suggested by a closer look at the dynamics of the existing male/male and female/female "buddy partnerships, both in comics and in other popular media. These same-sex "buddy" situations tend to fall into one of two categories: the partnership-of-equals type of relationship, perhaps most notably exemplified in the popular media by **BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID**, and the mentor/protege or junior-and-senior-partner relationship. Since the latter kind of "buddy" situation is much more common in super-hero comics, I will discuss it first.

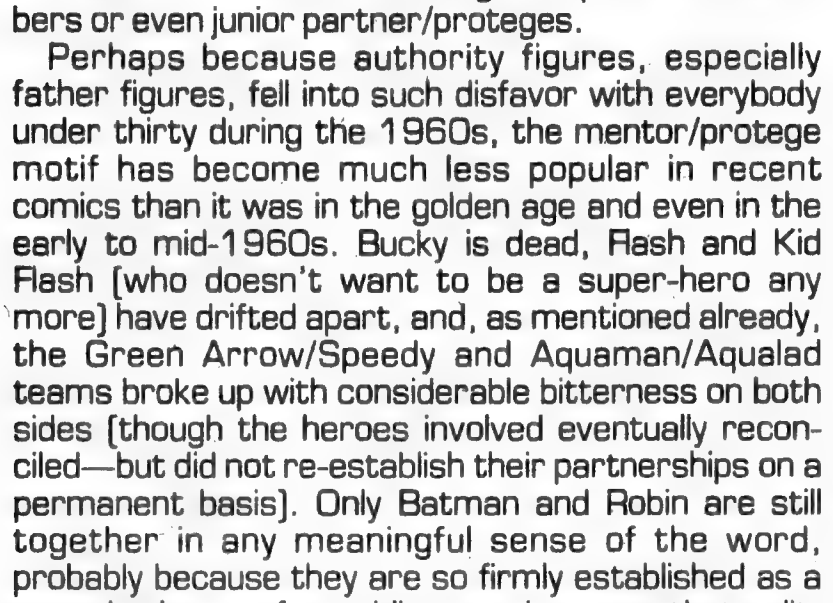
In a mentor/protege relationship, the senior partner acts as leader, planning all or most of the team's strategy himself and more or less telling the junior partner what to do (at least in broad outline). Usually such a relationship starts out with the experienced senior partner explicitly undertaking to teach the talented-but-ignorant junior partner the tricks of the trade. The junior partner, who is generally quite a bit younger, recognizes his own relative lack of knowledge and sophistication, and willingly apprentices himself to the acknowledged master/teacher. If the partnership continues long enough, the imbalance of power between the senior partner and the eventually fully-trained junior partner either becomes such a bone of contention that the team breaks up (as happened with Green Arrow and Speedy as well as with Aquaman and Aqualad), or it lessens to the point at which the two teammates become apparent equals or near-equals (as Modesty Blaise and Willie Garvin, the only existing male/female team of this type, apparently were virtually from the start). By the time the relationship has evolved to this point, the senior partner no longer has any need to give orders or to exert his authority over his less mature protege. This was the **status quo** which the Batman/Robin partnership seemed to have reached until the recent re-introduction of the mentor/student (or "parent/child") motif as part of DC's decision to have Dick Grayson drop out of college against his guardian Bruce Wayne's expressed wishes.

This type of same-sex relationship almost invariably involves two males (the only exception I know of is the late Batwoman (Kathy Kane) and her niece (Betty Kane), the original Bat-Girl), and has given us such classic teams as Batman and Robin, Captain America and Bucky, and a host of lesser-known super-heroes and their boy sidekicks. Note that this mentor/protege, junior-and-senior-partner relationship should not be confused with the superficially somewhat similar one of the super-hero and his usually non-super-powered mascot-**cum**-sidekick. Far from being a partner, even a junior partner, a mascot-type sidekick may very occasionally provide the hero with useful minor assistance in battle, but primarily functions as confidant (as did Thomas "Pieface" Kalmaku in the 1960s **GREEN LANTERN**s), or as comic relief—usually by getting in the hero's way through bumblingly inept attempts to help (**i.e.** Woozy Winks in **PLASTIC MAN**, Doiby Dickles in the golden age **GREEN LANTERN**, Bat-Mite in

1950s **BATMAN**s, and Etta Candy in the Golden Age **WONDER WOMAN**s. Etta was not inept, but supposedly amused the readers by constantly squealing "Woo woo!" and gobbling sweets]. Until quite recently, the female "partners" of male super-heroes who preferred "co-ed" teams tended to function much like these distracting and usually unhelpful "mascots," rather than acting as equal team members or even junior partner/proteges.

Perhaps because authority figures, especially father figures, fell into such disfavor with everybody under thirty during the 1960s, the mentor/protege motif has become much less popular in recent comics than it was in the golden age and even in the early to mid-1960s. Bucky is dead, Flash and Kid Flash [who doesn't want to be a super-hero any more] have drifted apart, and, as mentioned already, the Green Arrow/Speedy and Aquaman/Aqualad teams broke up with considerable bitterness on both sides [though the heroes involved eventually reconciled—but did not re-establish their partnerships on a permanent basis]. Only Batman and Robin are still together in any meaningful sense of the word, probably because they are so firmly established as a team in the non-fan public consciousness that splitting them up permanently would be as commercially suicidal as having Superman dump Lois Lane [especially with a multi-million dollar **BATMAN** movie in the works].

In the light of these developments, then, it would seem that the same-sex mentor/protege relationship is not a promising model for comics scripters to consider when writing about male/female teams. Besides, any attempt to adapt the junior-and-senior partner type of "buddy" relationship to characters of opposite sexes would run into a formidable additional obstacle: feminist readers would object to a woman being officially placed in the subordinate protege position [note the persistent complaints about Clea's role in **DOCTOR STRANGE**, which


NO, CLEA! PHYSICAL COMBAT IS USELESS AGAINST THIS CREATURE!
YOU MUST FREE YOUR MIND OF FEAR --CONCENTRATE!
THAT'S IT! JOIN ME ON THE ASTRAL PLANE!
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Clea: "...a woman being officially placed in the subordinate protege position."

Speedy on drugs. He and Green Arrow broke up "...with considerable bitterness on each side."

though they are certainly justified by the rather stereotyped characterization the other-dimensional sorceress has received since her introduction, would probably continue no matter how brilliantly she was handled], and practically none of the other readers would accept a woman as a senior partner [except in comfortably imaginary stories like the old **"Superwoman Trains Superboy"** two-parter in **ACTION COMICS #332-3** [Jan.-Feb. 1966], which had an unhappy ending anyway].

Therefore, it is to the same-sex partnership of equals that we must turn for clues about how the portrayal of male/female teams in comics can be improved. There are very few "buddy" relationships of this kind in comics. In fact, at the moment there are exactly two: Power Man and Iron Fist, and Misty Knight and Colleen Wing [a.k.a. Nightwing Restorations, or, inexplicably, The Daughters of the Dragon]. Both of these teams, oddly enough, inhabit the pages of the same comic. [I am not including the Nightwing-inspired team of Bethany Cabe and Ling MacPherson on this list, despite **IRON MAN** scripter David Michelinie's evident ambitions for them in this direction, because so far we have seen virtually nothing of them actually at work together. Thus, they come across more as best friends who share an office and hang around together after work than as classic "buddies" whose bond is professional as well as personal.]

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Power Man/Iron Fist and Misty Knight/Colleen Wing teams is that in each case, there are radical differences between the two halves of the partnership. The

The Daughters of the Dragon: "...the two women's personalities complement each other...giving the two halves of a partnership significant but compatible differences...may be one of the key elements."

Power/Fist team-up especially is so wildly improbable that it would undoubtably never have taken place if the Marvel management hadn't made the unexpected decision to consolidate two failing books into one instead of taking the more usual step of cancelling both. Danny [Iron Fist] Rand is white and rich; Luke [Power Man] Cage is black and dirt poor. Danny spent most of his formative years in the mystical, cloistered environment of K'un-Lun,and is still somewhat naive about the fast-paced American society he now inhabits; Luke is a streetwise native of the New York slums. Iron Fist's fighting prowess consists chiefly of preternaturally finely-honed martial arts technique; Power Man has no technique at all, but crushes the opposition by sheer brute strength, aided by bullet-repellent steel-hard skin.

Yet these very differences help make the two an effective team, since they are such opposites that whatever useful qualities one lacks, the other is likely to have. Luke's "street smarts" balance Danny's naivete; Danny's money and connections give Cage access to places—and jobs—that were strictly off limits to him before. In purely physical terms, when the two heroes pool their respective brute strength and high-level fighting skills, they can defeat almost any kind of opponent short of a cosmic-powered foe like Galactus or The Living Monolith.

Misty Knight's and Colleen Wing's differences complement each other in similar fashion. As with the Power/Fist pairing of raw power and fighting finesse, Misty's bionic arm and Colleen's martial arts training and samurai swordsmanship enable the two to take on a variety of different types of opponents in a fight. Even more important [at least in Chris Claremont's original version of the partnership, which current **POWER/FIST** scripter Jo Duffy has modified somewhat], the two women's personalities complement each other. Misty's extroverted warmth compensates for Colleen's short-tempered aloofness, and Colleen's coldly practical concentration on the matter at hand—even in thoroughly traumatic situations such as the old **IRON FIST** story-line in which her close friend Danny Rand was branded a murderer—balances Misty's tendency to be swept away by ultimately counterproductive moral indignation.

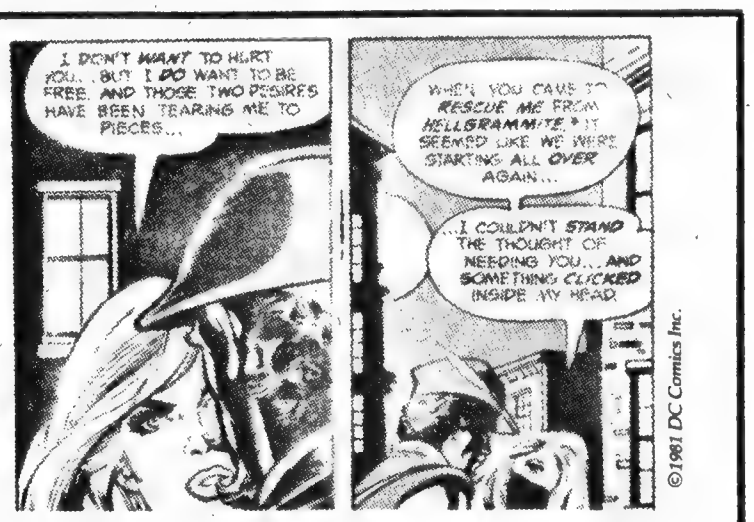
The successful complementarity of these two same-sex teams suggests that giving the two halves of a partnership significant but compatible differences in personality and super-abilities may be one of the key elements in creating a relationship which is both characterizationally intriguing and practical for super-heroic purposes. In fact, some of the more old-fashioned male/female teams seem to have been designed with something resembling this idea in mind. Basically, these somewhat outmoded pairings reflect the traditional notion of male/female complementarity as a match between an intelligent, courageous man and a female clinging vine who thinks with her heart, not her head. Stan Lee's early attempts at creating interesting relationships between superheroes and super-heroines tended to produce rigidly stereotyped couples like the staunch-but-humorless Reed Richards and the timid, weak-willed Sue Storm, and the staunch-but-repressed Hank [Ant-Man] Pym and the shallow, bubble-headed Wasp. Needless to say, the tedious sex-stereotyping of these pairs precluded anything remotely resembling an equal working partnership between the hero and the heroine. However, providing a married [or almost-married] hero and heroine with more individualized personal and/or power differences, instead of accenting the contrast between more or less randomly-selected, crudely "masculine" and "feminine" traits, could produce a well-matched super-hero couple whose respective strengths and weaknesses dovetail in convincing ways that suggest multiple characterizational and plot possibilities. [See, for example, Mark Gruenwald's flawed-but-intriguing and unconventional one-issue pairing in **SPIDER-WOMAN #15** of the [then-] somber, depressive Spider-Woman and Gruenwald's own [supposedly-]

witty, wisecracking version of The Shroud, whose super-powers of mystic senses and Batman-style atmospheric effects are far outclassed in purely physical terms by Spider-Woman's super-strength and flying ability.]

The idea of utilizing complementary differences between the male and female halves of a team may be useful to writers who are creating new characters or figuring out which already-existing hero and heroine would go well together as a couple. However, it won't be much help to scripters who are stuck writing stories about couples who have been paired off for years without displaying any personal qualities whatever which would enable them to play off each other [or anyone else] interestingly. Usually such characters are separate but equally dull types of dead bores, like the previously-mentioned Mr. and Mrs. Fantastic [Hank and Jan Pym are too irritating to be truly classic bores]. Occasionally, they are behaviorally identical dead bores, like the pre-Englehart Hawkman and Hawkgirl, who avoided potential accusations of sexism by behaving as much alike as if they shared a single personality—a very dull one.

In a situation like this, the scripter can take advantage of the minimal characterizational attention the hero and heroine have received in the past by gradually developing new [but not out of character] personality traits for each one, or by simply exploring aspects of their relationship that had always been taken for granted before, as Englehart did with the aforementioned Hawkman and Hawkgirl. Of course, if the writer isn't as skilled as Englehart, any such effort is likely to be less than a smashing success—but then, so is anything else he does.

Whether a scripter uses the idea of complementary differences as the inspiration to develop newly-differing individual personality quirks for excessively bland existing couples, or simply to pair up compatible but contrasting unattached heroes and heroines, he should take care to avoid the most characteristic pitfall of this approach: The Beatrice and Benedick Syndrome. In this syndrome, the super-hero couple's differences become so all-important that complementarity virtually ceases to exist. In other words, much like the male and female leads in Shakespeare's **MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING**, the hero and heroine spend most of their time quarreling with each other.


I DON'T *WANT* TO HURT YOU... BUT I *DO* WANT TO BE FREE. AND THOSE TWO DESIRES HAVE BEEN TEARING ME TO PIECES...
WHEN YOU CAME TO *RESCUE ME* FROM *HELLGRAMMITE*, IT SEEMED LIKE WE WERE STARTING ALL *OVER* AGAIN...
...I COULDN'T *STAND* THE THOUGHT OF NEEDING YOU... AND SOMETHING *CLICKED* INSIDE MY HEAD.
©1981 DC Comics Inc.

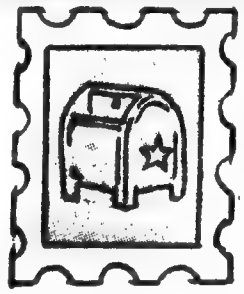
Green Arrow and Black Canary: "...using unmotivated lovers' quarrels as a handy excuse to split the characters up temporarily so they can each appear separately..."

An examination of the disastrous deterioration of the relationship between two of the first and most prominent sufferers from this syndrome, Daredevil and The Black Widow, demonstrates its catastrophic effects on both characterization and plot. Battles with villains degenerate into chaotic free-for-alls in which the hero and heroine are more concerned with elbowing each other aside than with actually catching the crooks. The characterizational possibilities of what initially appears to be a fresh new device for adding realism and shedding light on the nature of the couple's relationship are quickly exhausted, as vignettes of the heroes at home become one endless domestic squabble.

At least when scripter Steve Gerber realized that he didn't know how to get Daredevil and The Black Widow out of the frustrating and unproductive rut they'd fallen into, he had the imagination and the integrity to end the irreconcileably stormy affair realistically by having DD and The Widow break up. This is more than can be said for the various writers who have handled Green Arrow and Black Canary, from Denny O'Neil on. As these scripters should have realized years ago, using unmotivated lovers' quarrels as a handy excuse to split the characters up temporarily so they can each appear separately is as unlikely to appeal to readers as any other overworked formula for helping hack writers get from here to there.

If certain of the differences between the two halves of an established super-hero couple begin to seem more divisive than complementary, the scripter should have the characters realize this and try to deal with it, instead of mechanically reiterating the same old arguments every time they appear. Whether the differences between the two are complementary or a source of [partial] incompatibility, they should be explored and developed, rather than merely used as handy running **shticks.** The writer should not take the characters' relationship for granted, but should try to show why the hero and the heroine are the way they are [preferably through interaction with each other], and, above all, why they are together. He must try to strike an effective balance between the portrayal of individual differences and mutual teamwork. And if he does all these things well enough, he may manage to make some of those escapism-seeking kid readers decide that growing up and getting married might not be such an unattractive prospect after all.

Paul Dini is a graduate of Emerson College and a former animation writer for Filmation.



GROWING UP WITH UNCLE SCROOGE

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by Paul Dini

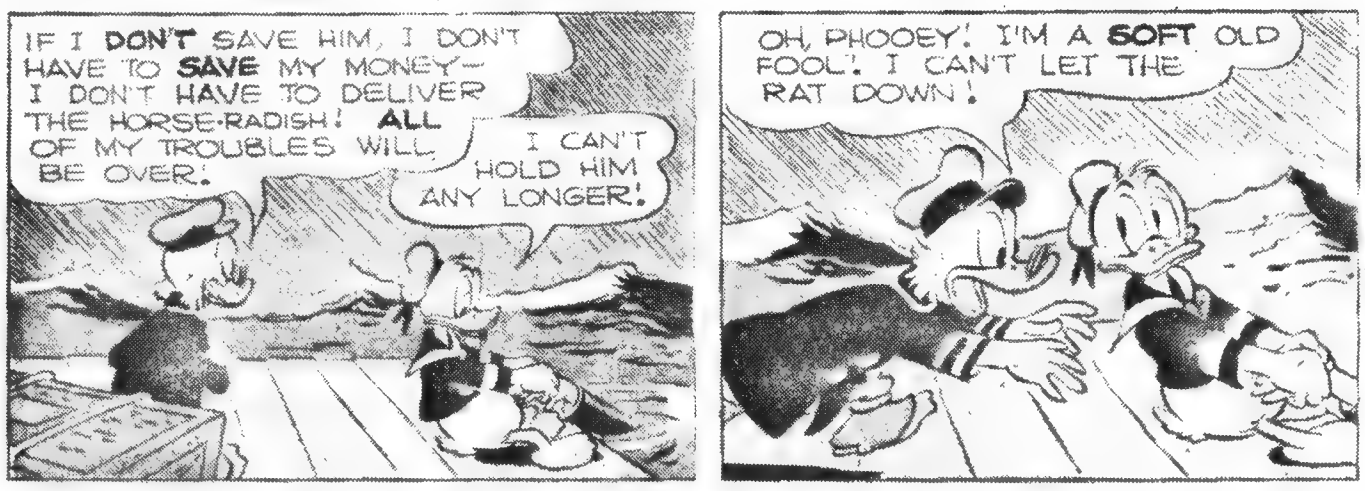
On my first visit to Disneyland at age six, I remember that the attraction I was most interested in seeing—more than the Jungle Cruise with its splashing elephants, or the towering Matterhorn, or Peter Pan's Flight Over London (a horrifying experience for anyone under thirty—take my word for it)—was the giant square-shaped vault that served as home for three cubic acres of cash, and the strange old duck that rolled around in it.

But though I dragged my obliging family from one end of the park to the other, I could find no trace of Uncle Scrooge McDuck's Money Bin, nor was there hide nor feather of the venerable old coot himself. At one point, I anxiously picked up a small statuette of a bespectacled mallard which I found in a Fantasyland gift shop, but quickly put it back when I sadly realized it was not Scrooge, only his heavily-hyped Sunday evening **doppelganger**, Ludwig Von Drake.

Finally, I turned to the one sure place where I had always encountered Scrooge before: the newsstand. Sure enough, inside the lobby of the Disneyland hotel was a rack prominently displaying copies of the Los Angeles Times, guide maps to Hollywood stars' homes, and (to my delight) **UNCLE SCROOGE #45, "Isle of the Golden Geese."** Happily clutching my prize, I left the Magic Kingdom in high spirits, my young faith in Walt Disney restored.

It's impossible to pin-point the very first Uncle Scrooge story I read. I was certainly aware of the character when I was six, and quite surprised not to see him merchandised in Disneyland as much as Mickey, Donald or Goofy. I do know that the first comic book I made a point to hang onto (and indeed, still own) was a reprint of **FOUR-COLOR #495**, known variously as the **"Chisel McSue"** or **"Horse-Radish"** story. To this day, for no particular reason other than I like it, it remains my favorite Scrooge story. True, it lacks the fantastic settings of such stories as **"The Golden Fleecing"** or **"Land Beneath the Ground,"** or the gently bittersweet romance of **"Back to the Klondike."** Yet, the horse-radish story remains for me a masterful example of writer/artist Carl Barks' power at his peak, a time he was more interested in character than caricature, and a period of draftsmanship excellence unequalled by anyone before or since in funny animal comics. Chisel McSue, an oily, Tex Avery-esque wolf, was a villain's villain. First attempting to destroy Scrooge through the courts, Chisel demanded that Scrooge must fulfill the conditions of an ancient agreement and deliver a long-lost crate of horse-radish to Jamaica. When it looked as if Scrooge might have a chance of succeeding, McSue tracked him down in a gunboat and blew his ship to pieces. Then, to ensure no witnesses, McSue knocked his accomplice out and threw him overboard. Heavy stuff for your typical funny animal story, but **UNCLE SCROOGE** under Barks was hardly your typical comic. Which is the main reason I have much the same affection for the **"Scrooge"** stories at age twenty-three that I had at age six.

Scrooge's world is not a world of change as say, the basic Marvel super-hero's world is. In the mid-sixties, when armed with twelve cents at my local drugstore, I'd debate with myself the merits of the latest **UNCLE SCROOGE** over the latest **THOR**, and would invariably put the **THOR** back and buy the **UNCLE SCROOGE**. At that point in my life, Marvel comics gave me headaches. I didn't want to have to go across town to the back-issue magazine store and root through unlabeled boxes of random comics (the convenient neighborhood specialty shop was unknown in those days) for the previous issue to find out why Karnilla was leading the frost-giants against Odin


IF I DON'T SAVE HIM, I DON'T HAVE TO SAVE MY MONEY— I DON'T HAVE TO DELIVER THE HORSE-RADISH! ALL OF MY TROUBLES WILL BE OVER.
I CAN'T HOLD HIM ANY LONGER!
OH, PHOOEY! I'M A SOFT OLD FOOL! I CAN'T LET THE RAT DOWN!
©1981 Walt Disney Inc

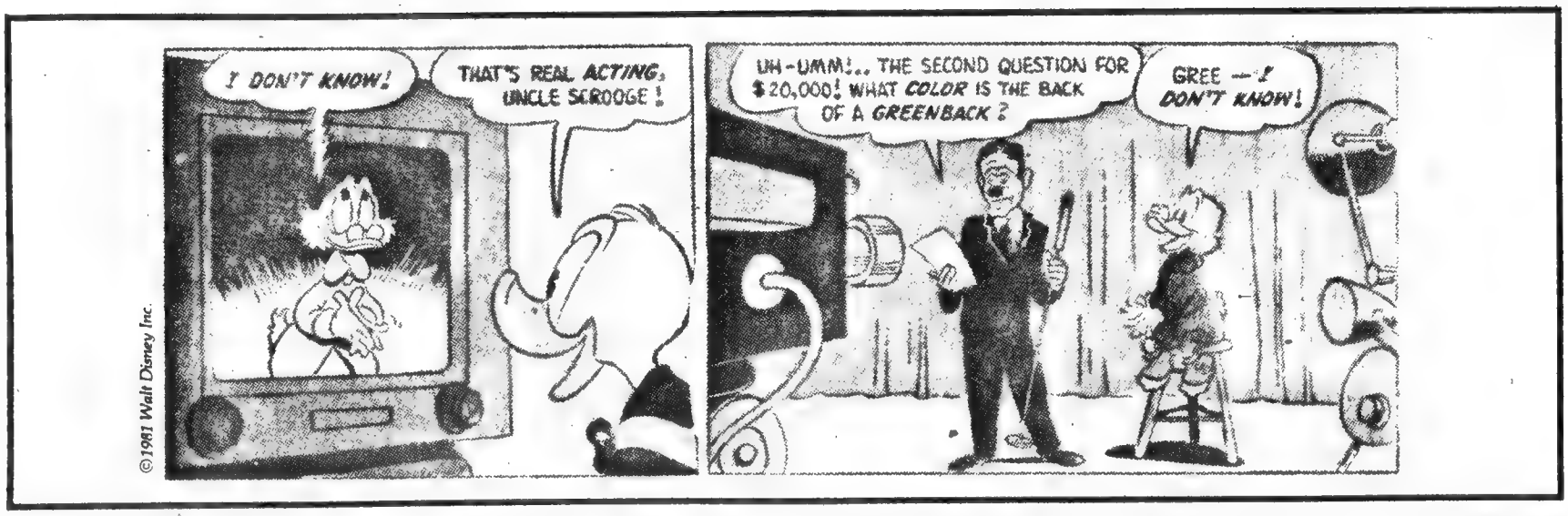
Scrooge is a go-getter, yet a square dealer.

[again] or the cause behind Jane Foster's latest fatal illness [again].

Scrooge's world is a simple one of affable dog-or-pig-headed people, con-men and shysters. Yet, danger and real magic exist, as does the possibility of death. It was Barks' fusing of the serious and comic that made stories like **"The Old Castle's Secret," "The Great Wig Mystery"** and **"Swamp of No Return"** work not only as excellent comic book stories, but also as finely-crafted children's literature. Barks was a master of the device set-up; introducing a small, seemingly insignificant element within the first two pages of the story, and bringing that element back to play a crucial role in the outcome of the adventure. The small strand of string that Scrooge shows Donald at the beginning of **"The Second-Richest Duck"** is a prime example of this. So are the trade-rats in **"All at Sea,"** and Scrooge's watch in **"The Lost Crown of Genghis Khan."** Such plot devices would be cheats if brought in unannounced at the last minute, but thanks to Barks' set-up, they always seemed inventive [or at least plausible] ways to wrap up a story. It's always more satisfying to know that a last-minute escape really could happen because of a logical twist in the storyline, and Barks rarely missed a chance to put one in.

So, clever storytelling technique was one of the reasons I was attracted to the **"Scrooge"** stories. The other reason was Scrooge himself. Who, after all, could resist a story built around a creature who held the title of "World's Richest Duck?" Also, the fact that he was Donald Duck's uncle, and yet, never appeared in films with him, made the character more mysterious and attractive to me. Who was he? Where did he come from and how did he get so much money? **THE PEOPLE'S ALMANAC** [pub. 1977] carries what may be the one definitive biography of Scrooge McDuck. As their entry is too long and diverse to reprint here, I can only refer the interested reader to that particular work. Suffice it to say that Scrooge is a creation of which Horatio Alger would be proud; a go-getter, and in spite of his reputation for driving a hard bargain, a square-dealer. Interestingly, though Scrooge's fortune is upward of the five billion quadruplatillion umtuplatillion multuplatillion dollar range [give or take a few trillion], he shows little interest in material things, and exhibits disdain for those who do [though he himself has been known to make concessions just to keep up appearances, as in **"Travel Tightwad," UNCLE SCROOGE #45**]. Scrooge's greatest treasure is in the dollar honestly earned and wisely saved. It would seem that those are ideals highly thought of by Carl Barks, too, because he never missed an opportunity to lampoon spendthrifts, gold-bricks and loafers. In a classic **COMICS AND STORIES** adventure, Donald, full of contempt for his shiftless cousin Gladstone, sets out to wreak havoc at a social function appropriately titled "The Idle Dandies Picnic." The Idle Dandies themselves are depicted as a marvelously idiotic group, dancing mindlessly beneath the trees, and stuffing their faces with whatever food is within arm's reach. When Donald's plan backfires, and he places the picnicers in a truly hazardous situation, they are loath to do anything to save themselves, preferring to wait it out until the highway crews come to rescue them. "Yahs!" sniffs a complacent pig-woman, "After all, we **are** Idle Dandies!"

Barks used two basic plots for the Scrooge stories: 1. Scrooge goes out to make more money, 2. Scrooge tries to hold on to what he already has. Actually, when you work with a character like Scrooge, there aren't too many choices about the stories you can do. What point is there to a tale of the world's richest duck taking out his dry-cleaning, say, if he doesn't find a few lost gold mines along the way? My favorite stories were the latter classification, in which Scrooge had to use his ingenuity to safeguard his fortune from some money-hungry marauder. The Beagle Boys were lots of fun, but I was never able to see them as a serious threat. They might succeed in stealing Scrooge's money by virtue of their numbers alone, [a typical B. Boys' gang boasting between three and nine members] but they were never bright


I DON'T KNOW!
THAT'S REAL ACTING, UNCLE SCROOGE!
UH-UMM!.. THE SECOND QUESTION FOR $20,000! WHAT COLOR IS THE BACK OF A GREENBACK?
GREE — I DON'T KNOW!
©1981 Walt Disney Inc.

enough to hold onto it for very long. For all their brawn and numbers, the Beagle Boys were just a gang of big kids who went out and spent what money they managed to pilfer on giant banana splits and other playthings.

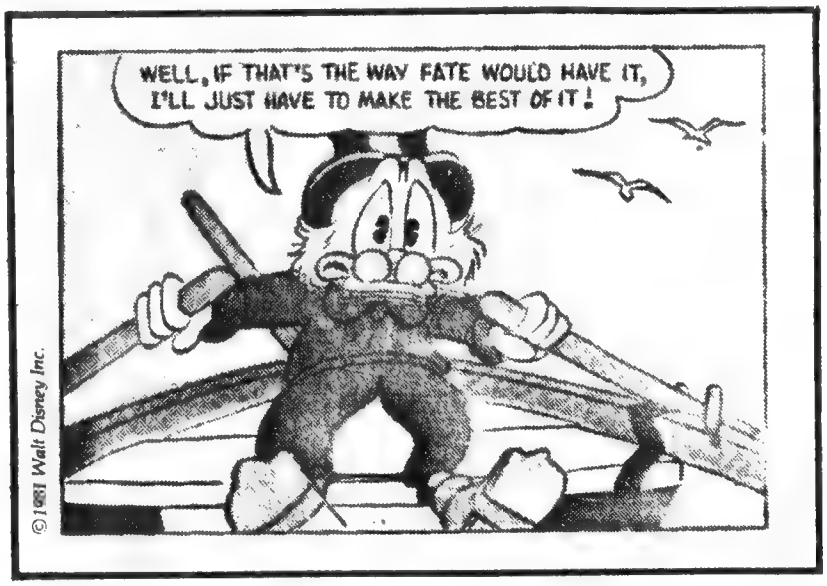
A far more serious threat to Scrooge was the slinky sinister sorceress, Magica de Spell. For reasons known only to herself, Magica believes Scrooge's old number one dime will bring her power and riches. Scrooge has neither proved nor disproved her theory; however, the dime she seeks was the very first coin Scrooge earned, so it has great sentimental value to him, if nothing else. As he is driven to bizarre extremes to protect it, so is she driven to equally bizarre extremes to get it. Over the years, she used comets, meteors, magic potions, and any number of disguises in her attempts to get old number one, but still came away dimeless. Magica is a greater foe than the Beagle Boys, not only because of her sorcerous powers, but because of the lengths she will go to achieve her goal. None of the Beagles want to see Scrooge badly harmed in their run-ins: He's too valuable a money-maker to finish off for good. However, Magica has no qualms about destroying Scrooge or his nephews to gain possession of one dime.

Scrooge's third biggest adversary is Flintheart Glomgold, a wealthy South African industrialist. Unlike the Beagle Boys or Magica, Glomgold is not interested in stealing Scrooge's money, merely stealing away his title as world's richest duck. However, Scrooge guards his title with the same fervor that he guards his first dime, and he has bested Glomgold in several all-out displays of wealth.

If I had to pick a favorite villain, I couldn't. Again, with Barks, it's more a question of how he structures his stories than who's in it. The Beagles, especially, have shown up in some very disappointing efforts [**"The Giant Robot Robbers"** and **"The Seven Cities of Cibola"** spring quickly to mind], though it should be remembered that second-rate Barks is generally head and shoulders above anybody else.

It should be noted though that while both Carl Barks and Uncle Scrooge gained a reputation from the book-length exotic adventures like **"Flying Dutchman"** and **"Tra La La,"** many of the shorter stories are marvels of tight pacing and slick character work. **"Two-Way Luck"** and **"Deep Down Doings"** are good examples, though my personal favorite is one which was, sadly, "borrowed" from my collection at one point, so I am not sure of the title. The plot, however, deals with Scrooge's appearance on a TV game show. Although he is anxious to win some easy money by answering some ridiculously simple questions, Scrooge is told—unfortunately, immediately before he goes on—that any money he wins will drive him into a higher tax bracket. Donald has the solution: simply say "I don't know" to all the questions. What follows is a rather humiliating experience for Scrooge as he answers such questions as "What color is a greenback?" and "What metal is a silver dollar made of?" each with the reply "I don't know!" Though Scrooge fails all the questions, he still has his taxes boosted, for the judges award him a $100,000.00 consolation prize for being the stupidest man ever to appear on television!

It is too bad that Disney [meaning both the man and the company that bears his name] never saw the potential in Scrooge as an animated cartoon character. To date, Scrooge's film career consists of a brief appearance at the beginning of **THE NEW MICKEY MOUSE CLUB** and a theatrical featur-



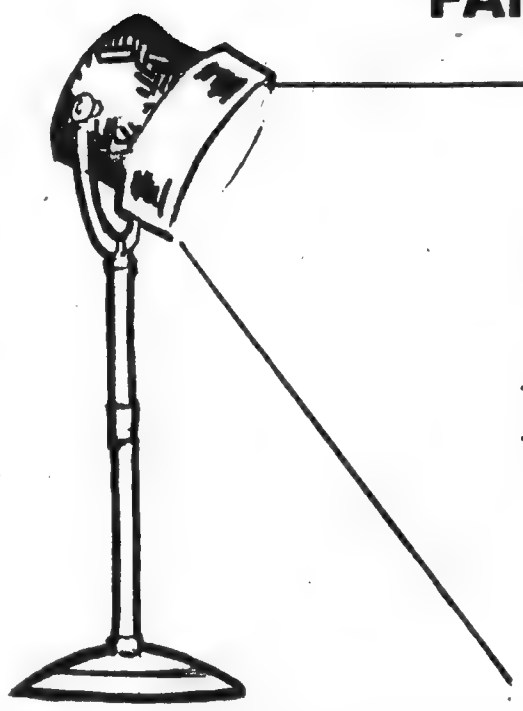
ette, **UNCLE SCROOGE AND MONEY**. Although I have not seen it, the latter has been described to me as an instructive film on the workings of capitalism and uses Scrooge as narrator. Of course, there is no one better qualified to address such a topic, but it is rather sad to think that one featurette is the sum total of one of Disney's most popular comics characters. Even sadder still, when stories like **"The Golden Fleecing"** and **"Back to the Klondike"** seem tailor-made for wide-screen treatment.

Still, as I said before, Uncle Scrooge's true home is in the comics. The editors at Western Publishing, at least, realize the tremendous demand not only for the Scrooge material, but any story written and drawn by Carl Barks, and are making his work more available now than ever before. This is good news for collectors [such as myself] who are more interested in reading a story and not paying the exorbitant dealers' prices for books where a given **"Scrooge"** or **"Duck"** story first appeared. The Dynabrite books are an especially good value, printed between heavy covers on long-lasting paper, and selling for little over what a regular comic on the newsstand costs.

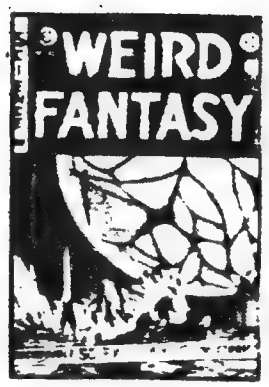
Around age sixteen, I put Scrooge and the Disney Ducks aside for awhile to concentrate on more "serious" matter such as **SPIDER-MAN, THE FANTASTIC FOUR** and **CONAN**. Three years later, bored stiff and disillusioned with mainstream comics on the whole, I came across my tattered old copy of the **"Horse-Radish"** story under a pile of **FREAK BROTHERS** books. That did it. The prodigal nephew was home to stay, and since then, my rekindled affection for the Duckburg gang and the work of Carl Barks has never wavered.

Growing up with Uncle Scrooge was a wonderful experience. I hope it's one I never grow out of.

FANDOM SPOTLIGHT ON...



AN INTERVIEW WITH RUSS COCHRAN



©1981 William Gaines

Russ Cochran is best known today for his complete (in-progress) reprinting of the entire output of EC Comics. Russ is also a dealer in original comics art and the publisher of *GRAPHIC GALLERY*.

In the first five years of the 1950s, Entertaining Comics reigned under the watchful eye of publisher Bill Gaines as a kind of Camelot in the comics-publishing world. Many believe that Gaines assembled the finest staff of writers and artists ever involved with comic books. Even today, their names read like a list in the Comics Hall of Fame: Joe Orlando, Reed Crandall, Frank Frazetta, George Evans, Jack Davis, Alex Toth, John Severin, Will Elder, Kurtzman, Feldstein, Wood, Ingels, and Williamson...

For a brief five years, a light shone in Camelot. But the paranoia of McCarthy's commie-seeking Senate, The Cold War, a shrinking market, the zealous Dr. Wertham, and a jealous comics competition snuffed out the light. EC Comics, with the exception of *MAD*, was dead. If William Gaines and Al Feldstein had written a final EC plot about a physics chairman who gave up his professorship to reprint the entire EC line fifteen years later, no one would have believed their story. So Russ Cochran began to write it in 1970.

Russ Cochran: I first got involved with EC Comics when my brother, Rick, was sick and had to stay home from school one day. My dad had to go down to the drugstore and get him some comic books to read. I had passed out of the comics reading age. I had gotten tired of Superman and Capt. Marvel, and went on to getting interested in basketball and girls, cars and things like that. One of the comic books my dad brought home was an EC. It was a **HAUNT OF FEAR**, as I recall. And I read that comic book and thought: "Wow! This is different from other comic books I have been reading." I wasn't completely out of my comic book phase, so I was still in it enough that I started picking up ECs. This must have been in 1951. I didn't get in on the early ECs—the ones that came out in 1950—and never even read those until in the '60s when I started to collect comics for real. But I saw my first EC then, and I immediately started to buy them all, and soon formed an EC club in our neighborhood. We had about 8 to 10 members, and each of the members had to donate a dime a week or something like that. We had a dues and we used the money to subscribe to all the ECs. We subscribed to every title.

Michael Vance: So you were an original member of the EC Fan Addict Club sponsored by EC Comics?

Russ: In fact, we actually formed our club **before** that was announced, and since the subscription copies were mailed out before the newsstand copies, we learned of the formation of the EC Fan Addict Club early, and we became chapter #3.

Mike: Since you obviously chose the EC comic book line to reprint, do you believe them superior to the rest published? If so, why?

Russ: I don't think I could pinpoint any very specific point than I think they were better written and drawn. That's really it. I, at that time, was not a big fan of EC's **TWO FISTED TALES** comic which Harvey Kurtzman edited and did some writing and art for, but Al Feldstein, now editor of **MAD** magazine, was a writer who was steeped in pulp magazines and radio. Reading one of his stories was like listening to the radio. Feldstein used a lot of captions in his panels which explained things that were happening that many comic book writers today would think unnecessary. But it was a combination of Feldstein's writing and his snap endings. After you've read comic books for a number of years, and you're past page three, you know that Capt. America is going to win, or the Red Sparrow is going to lose, and it's just a matter of how it happens. But if you read an EC, you didn't know how it was going to end. And sometimes the good guy didn't win. Then it was the superior artwork after the writing. After you read

enough ECs, you could even predict what the snap ending would be, and some of the fun went out of that. But then you could get enjoyment from the art of Wally Wood, Jack Davis and Graham Ingels and others.

Ingels was my favorite then and still is, but there were others like Al Williamson who was probably my second favorite artist. He would be further down my list now. Krigstein was probably my least favorite then; now he would be in the top three or four.

Mike: Since EC Comics went out of business in the middle '50s with the exception of **MAD**, there have been hundreds of explanations for its demise. Joe Brancatelli has written that EC was put out of business by other comics publishers who owned distribution companies because EC's success was draining **their** profits. What do you think killed EC Comics?

Russ: Joe might be right. Bill Gaines' father, Max Gaines, had developed a lot of very good comic book properties in partnership with Harry Donenfeld. Donenfeld one day out of the clear blue sky gave his half of All-American Comics to his accountant, Jack Leibowitz. Leibowitz was the guy who Max Gaines couldn't get along with, so Max walked into his office one day and said, "I can't stand this anymore; you buy me out or I'll buy you out." So Leibowitz bought Max Gaines out for $500,000. The only comic books Gaines got to keep were **PICTURE STORIES FROM THE BIBLE, PICTURE STORIES FROM HISTORY, TINY TOTS, ANIMAL FABLES**. Leibowitz went on his way and continued being the comic book king of the world. Max Gaines was killed in 1947 in an accident, and his son, Bill, took over the company between 1947 and 1950. Bill Gaines first floundered around trying to find out what he should be doing. In 1950, he launched his "New Trend" comics, and all of a sudden, possibly, Leibowitz saw Gaines as coming into a new empire and building up a whole new thing. So, possibly, he might have thought that this would be a way to put Gaines under—manipulating, to some degree, the events that put EC under. I think the real bottom line, however, is involved with knowing what kind of guy William Gaines is. Bill was being called communist, called all types of bad names in court and McCarthy Senate hearings, in public, in print, and he didn't like it. I think that Gaines finally came to a point where he said, "I've had it; it isn't worth it anymore. They've attacked me all these ways, and my distributor is going bankrupt." **MAD** magazine at that point, as you know, was in its twenty-second issue and was climbing fast and looked like it was going to be something good. He decided it was inevitable, and that to keep fighting any longer would be futile. So he voluntarily threw in the towel and put all of his eggs into **MAD** and the rest is history.

Mike: With the new surge of interest in horror, do you think Gaines might revive the EC line of comics?

Russ: No. Gaines was running out of material back then anyway. He had a file system of what he called "springboards"—a basic story idea. Man goes into partnership with other man in chicken frying business—one man tries to cheat the other—partner gets fried in the deep-fat fryer and comes back to haunt. Gaines had a big collection of these. Every morning, he and Feldstein would come in to the office, and Gaines would try to sell Feldstein on one of his ideas. And Feldstein would say, "No, no; we've done that, let's do something else." And Gaines would go through his springboards until they found one they could do. After five years of doing that, they were almost out of material then.

Mike: With the decline of many major magazines, how did Russ Cochran the fan convince himself to become Russ Cochran the small-press publisher? You took a big chance in a shrinking market.

Russ: All the years I was in college getting my Ph.D. in physics, I didn't read comics. I didn't know anything

Russ Cochran, publisher of *THE COMPLETE EC LIBRARY*

about comics fandom, or that people collected comics. Then in 1964, I got my degree, and the first thing I got hold of in fandom was a copy of **ERB-DOM**. While I was doing my dissertation, I would read Edgar Rice Burroughs' books to relieve the pressures. I would work four or five hours in a row doing high-powered math, and then sit back and need a mental enema of some type. I would go pick an ERB book, and sit down and read it straight through. In the flyleaf of one of these books there was a little thing about **ERB-DOM** which was something I never heard of called a fanzine. So I wrote to Ace Books and said, "What's this **ERB-DOM**," and they sent back an address from Louisiana. I wrote down there and started subscribing to this small-press magazine, and through this I got into all the rest of fandom. In one issue of **ERB-DOM**, it was mentioned that some of the old EC artists were getting back together for Warren Publishing's **CREEPY** and **EERIE** maga-

zines. So I started reading **CREEPY** and **EERIE**. Then I found out about **THE BUYER'S GUIDE FOR COMICS FANDOM**... no, first it was **THE FANTASY COLLECTOR** in California and the **ROCKET'S BLAST COMIC COLLECTOR** in Florida. I subscribed. My first objective was simply to complete my EC collection. After I graduated, I came back to West Plains, Missouri, where my folks were living, and went up into the attic and found my ECs. I got them out and read them all again—had a real fun time reliving all that, and then I found out that people collected these, and I finally found ways to get in contact. I started buying ECs for a long time for $1 a copy. I'd send away $50 and get fifty ECs. The reason I got that low price was I didn't ask for specific issues. In doing that, I built up a lot of duplicates, triplicates, and used those to trade. Coincidentally, I was the chairman of the physics department at Rush University. They wanted me to go to New York once a year for the annual meeting of the American Physical Society. In January, I would stay at the New York Hilton, get to eat at good restaurants and everything. All paid for. The first or second time, it occured to me that EC happened in New York, and maybe I could look up the publisher, Bill Gaines, who I knew was still publishing **MAD**. I wrote him a letter that said something like, "Dear Mr. Gaines, I'm a former reader of your old EC Comics, and just thought you might like to know that among our fan club we produced a college professor, a doctor, a teacher, and not one murderer or rapist or monster of any kind despite what was said against EC in the '50s. So that you didn't lose too badly." He wrote back a real nice letter, and said if I was ever in New York, come and visit. The next time I went to New York for one of my meetings, I did that. And found out that one of the things he likes to do best is eat. He's a gourmet, and likes to go to fancy New York restaurants. What he wanted to do when I would go to New York was take me out to eat, and we would sit there during the course of the meal, maybe two hours, and just talk about whatever happened to Graham Ingels, why did you do this. He was very eager to talk, and we enjoyed each other's company. One time when I was there, there was some EC original artwork in his office, laying over to one side. And he asked me if I'd like to look at it. I said, sure I would. It was big—about 15" x 20" from the side, and I looked through them and said, "Gee, this stuff's really great." I could see immediately that there was detail in the art that never made it to the comic books. I didn't put two and two together at that point. I just said, "Wow," and went back home. But then a little light bulb came on in my head some time after that. I thought, "Well, maybe Gaines will let me reproduce this art in a large size so people could see how detailed it was." This was 1970. So I asked him about that, and he said, "yeah," I could do that if I would pay him a royalty and protect the copyrights. I went and found a printer.

AFTER ALL, NEXT TO THE FAMILY, THE SEWING MACHINE IS MY MOST PRECIOUS POSSESSION!
OYA OYA! THERE IS THE NOISE THEY MAKE WHEN THEY DROP BOMBS!
MMRROWW
© 1981 William Gaines
The realistic horror of EC's war comics. Art by Wood.

Next time I was in New York, I got the art from Gaines, took it out and had it photographed, brought the negatives back home and had a portfolio printed up which I called **EC PORTFOLIO #1**. I had aimed for a print run of a thousand, but I went through each copy and every now and then found one with a blurred page or a smear, so I'd eliminate. I ended up with 800-some copies which I sold for $10 each. Lo and behold, after nine to twelve months, I'd sold them all. And people were wanting to know when **EC PORTFOLIO #2** was going to be out. In the beginning, my idea was this: I could make enough on an **EC PORTFOLIO** to pay my way to conventions. I wanted to go to the New York Convention, to places like Houston, Chicago, San Diego. Being a college professor, I couldn't afford to just take off and go. I essentially gambled the first time. I recall that it cost around $2,000 for the printing costs for the first portfolio. I remember at the time thinking that the worst that could happen was I'd lose the money, and thought I could survive that. I sold some of my copies to dealers, some to collectors. On the whole thing, I probably ended up making about $1,500. I thought, hey, I had fun, I did something that other fans enjoy, and I made $1,500! I've been doing it ever since. I've given up physics completely, but I have often said half-jokingly that my life so far has run in ten year cycles. I don't think my publishing cycle started with the first portfolio. It started when I moved to West Plains five years ago. Between 1970 and 1975, I got more and more into publishing, and less and less into teaching. In 1975, I made the big decision to quit teaching and go into publishing. I figure that in 10 or 12 years, something else will come along. I don't intend in going out looking for something, but it'll come along.

I find it really interesting that a man like me can make a living by catering to the tastes of EC comics people. All the **WEIRD SCIENCE** sets are sold. I've sold virtually all of the **TALES FROM THE CRYPT**

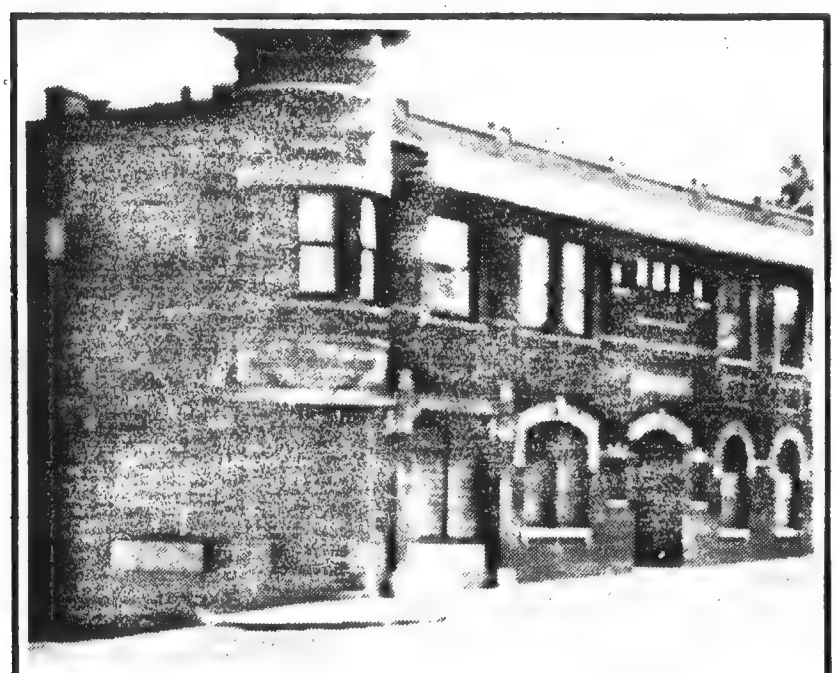
comic book sets. My audience is somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 people. Also, to back up that figure, East Coast Comics, who did the small EC reprints, needed 15,000 readers to make it work; they never had it.

Mike: Are your customers new to EC comics, or people who grew up reading **THE VAULT OF HORROR** and **SHOCK SUSPENSTORIES**?

Russ: Most of them grew up with ECs.

Chris Rock: I recognize a lot of names of **my** contemporaries, guys who got into reading comics ten years after you, Russ. For instance, you said originally you didn't like Bernie Krigstein art, but came to enjoy it later. I went through the same thing in about a year and a half. I know quite a few who went through this same process.

Mike: Isn't some of this new appreciation due to today's comic book criticism and analysis that didn't ex-



Russ Cochran's headquarters.

ist before the early 1960s? We're more educated about the language and techniques of comics now.

Chris: That was the only way I had to base my opinions of EC on.

Russ: I know very few, Bill Spicer is one, who read all of the ECs when they first came out. They came in around '52 or '53. Back then, there was just no thing as buying back issues of comics. I think a lot of my audience is people like that.

Mike: You're relatively close to major comics publishers. Do you know or think that comic books are on their way out?

Russ: I do. Yes. I don't know if there will ever be a time when there are NO comic books. There will always be a specialty market. Retail outlets don't like to deal with comic books, and wholesalers don't like to handle comics. For the first time in history, specialty distributors like Bud Plant and Phil Seuling can take maybe 20% of a complete run of a comic. Marvel and DC could conceivably print their comics and sell them **only** through comic book stores.

Mike: Marvel and DC Comics are owned by larger corporations that demand large profits. How could comics survive their own corporations with limited press runs and small profits?

Russ: They don't make any money from publishing comic books. It's all from merchandising. The movies, TV shows, lunch buckets... that's where the money is to be made. That's why I think they'll never give up those **characters**. Back in the '40s when I was a kid, there were comics that sold two or three million copies each issue. Now, 200,00 or 300,000 is a big sale. Very big. Let's say the comic book stores that didn't exist ten years ago could account for 50,000 copies. Which is better? To print 300,000 copies, send them all out and get 150,000 back and have all that waste, or to have guaranteed, non-returnable sales of every copy?

Mike: All magazines are in the crunch of contricting markets. TV, movies and now videotapes are eating away at the print market. Even EC faced a dwindling market in the '50s. Do you see newsstands and print disappearing as fewer people read?

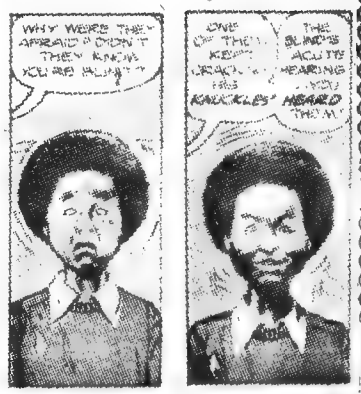
Russ: I think magazines like **TIME** and **NEWSWEEK** will see a bleak future. Television is a better medium for news. If two nations start bombing each other, we want to know it in five minutes instead of waiting a week for **TIME** to tell us about it. Specialty magazines of a certain type don't translate well to the visual medium. Specialty magazines proliferate, like gun collecting, coins, jogging will find markets.

Chris: I think we're in between major types of mass appeal industries. We're moving out of the mechanical age into the electronic age. I think books are going to pass away.

Russ: Book people not only like what's printed on a page, but the smell of the paper, to turn the page, feel the texture. Seeing that on a video-screen just wouldn't be the same. There will be guys like me in the future who will come back and print books again for people who don't like electronic books.

AS THE CLOUD OF RADIO-ACTIVE SMOKE MUSHROOMED UPWARD, THERE RAINED DOWN OVER A TWENTY MILE AREA SMALL GREENISH BLOBS...
WHAT THE...?
GOOD LORD!
©1981 William Gaines

A typical EC story ending. Art by Al Feldstein.


WHY WERE THEY AFRAID? DIDN'T THEY KNOW YOU'RE BLIND?
ONE OF THEM KEPT CRACKING HIS KNUCKLES
THE BLIND'S ACUTE HEARING
YOU HEARD THEM

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Murray Ward is a library assistant at the University of Manitoba, and a graduate of same, with a B.A. in English and Film.

Four-Color Words: NO COMICS FOR ALICIA

by Murray Ward

Ever wonder if the characters you read about in comics themselves read comics?

Alicia Masters doesn't, but her boyfriend Ben Grimm reads them to her on occasion.

Matt Murdock does, but each one takes him as long as a short novel to digest.

If you've been a regular reader of Marvel Comics for any period of time, you'll be aware that the two above-named characters are among the better-known of the relatively few characters in comics who possess permanent physical handicaps. Alicia, longtime love-interest of The Fantastic Four's rock-like Thing, and Matt, secretly the costumed crusader called Daredevil, are both blind. Since comics are a unique blending of words and pictures, it is quite impossible to print them in Braille, the "written" language of the blind [and it would hardly be economically feasible even if it **were** possible], so while Alicia can use her highly-developed sense of touch to sculpt the statues which are her livelihood, she can never read a comic book. Matt, as Daredevil, possesses as his super-power super-developed senses other than his lost sight, and thus is able to read a printed page by running his fingers over it and feeling the impression of the ink. Imagine, however, how long it must take him to "feel" not aonly all the words, but all the pictures and colors and strangely-lettered sound effects of a typical comic! It must be more trouble than it's worth—not to mention the problems that would arise when Matt tried to explain his comics collection to his friends, who don't know that he is Daredevil and are thus unaware of his hyper-senses.

Everything in the last paragraph is pretty obvious when you stop and think about it, right? Yet how often have you seen any of these points, not necessarily relating to the reading of comics but to the day-to-day realities of the handicapped regular character, mentioned in an issue of **DAREDEVIL** or **FANTASTIC FOUR**? Thus, this article, which will try to touch, however briefly, on the existent handicapped persons who appear in comics, and the difficulties of portraying them correctly.

THEN, YOU COULD STAND BY AND SEE A WORLD DESTROYED??
HOW...HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN SO WRONG ABOUT YOU...WHEN I SENSED NOBILITY...WHEN I THOUGHT YOU POSSESSED... COMPASSION!
PERHAPS, HUMAN.. YOU WERE NOT TOTALLY WRONG..!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

Alicia and The Silver Surfer. Alicia was conspicuous by her absence in the animated version of the "Galactus Trilogy," perhaps illustrating the TV writers' discomfort with a blind character who does not get miraculously cured in the final reel.

At times, your author is given to thinking that there must really be three old crones called Fates who control men's destinies in subtle fashion. Why else would it

BAMBI IS ALL ALONE NOW... NO MOTHER NO PLACE TO GO...
HULK CAN'T BE BAMBI'S MOTHER...
BUT HULK WILL BE BAMBI'S FRIEND... TAKE CARE OF BAMBI... ONLY
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

The Hulk and Bambi from *DEFENDERS #31*. Childlike, impressionable, and only violent when threatened: "...it seems to [Murray Ward] that the reason The Hulk's intellect has never advanced beyond that of a human toddler is that...he has only been sentient as The Hulk for a couple of years."

be that since this article's main thesis first occurred to me over a year ago, a] I have made my first personal acquaintance among the handicapped community, b] I have taken a course enabling me to better communicate with that person, and c] 1981 has been declared the International Year of the Disabled? All of this, let me reiterate, is sheerest coincidence; the article idea did not inspire nor arise from the other happenings. The latter, however, did get me thinking. **To wit:**

In the cases of a good 99 % of those of you reading this, I can sum up your entire experience with handicapped individuals: **BUTTERFLIES ARE FREE, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN** [Parts I and II], perhaps **NO OTHER LOVE** and its clone **LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE**, and the recent **VOICES**. That's right, they're all movies. Some of them are well-done, others not so well-done, all of them romances, love stories involving one or more physically or mentally disadvantaged participants, all of them of the genre known by those who disdain sloppy sentimentality as "tear-jerkers." [For those who may have missed them, the first-named concerns a blind youth; the second and its sequel feature a crippled ex-skier; the next two present virtually identical liaisons between mentally retarded couples; and the last stars a deaf girl. Completists may want to add **ICE CASTLES**, about a skater who goes blind; **CHARLY**, based on the award-winning story **FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON**, about a retarded man who has his intelligence increased; and a few others I've forgotten.]

The point is that none of us [and I'm speaking to the vast majority of you who are completely sound of mind and limb and who possess a full range of senses, as I do] have any personal experience with the handicapped. With the exceptions of an uncle and a personal friend—both of whom walk with very pronounced limps [one due to the childhood contraction of polio, the other due to having fallen off a roof at age 12]—neither of whom I ever really thought of as handicapped because their disabilities never prevented them from leading perfectly normal lives, I myself knew no handicapped person until last year. And even then, the circumstance was outside my control; I didn't seek out the opportunity. The university workers where I work decided to hire a deaf person as one of my co-workers. A huge, supposedly coldly-impersonal institution did more than I had ever thought of attempting. Score one for concerned individual over uncaring monolithic group-mind entity, right? And most of you out there are the same as me. Now this is not an advertisement for "Hire the Handicapped"; I merely want to point out that if we, the readers, have no experience of that about which we are reading and thus we can safely presume that most of the comics writers, being at their cores

DANGER, MY SOVEREIGN LIEGE--! THERE IS DANGER THIS DAY!
STALLIOR--!
GO ON--SPEAK, STALLIOR. BLACK BOLT'S EYES SHOW HIS CONCERN.
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

Black Bolt, leader of The Inhumans. Medusa interprets Black Bolt's attitudes through some impenetrable code between them.

fairly average souls like ourselves, also have little experience. How, then, can they be expected to write realistically about the disadvantaged character, and if they make an error, who is going to point it out to them?

Before we discuss that point by looking at the existing pertinent characters in comics, let me defend my choice of terminology. For years, social workers and educators, among others, have searched for a properly inclusive yet non-derogatory cognomen for the handicapped in our society. The main problem is that as soon as a term comes into common use, it automatically becomes an insult; for example, the words "idiot" and "moron" were once purely clinical descriptions of various stages of mental retardation; the phrase "deaf and dumb" has a unsought connotation of feeble-mindedness, and is ambiguous even in its true meaning, since the

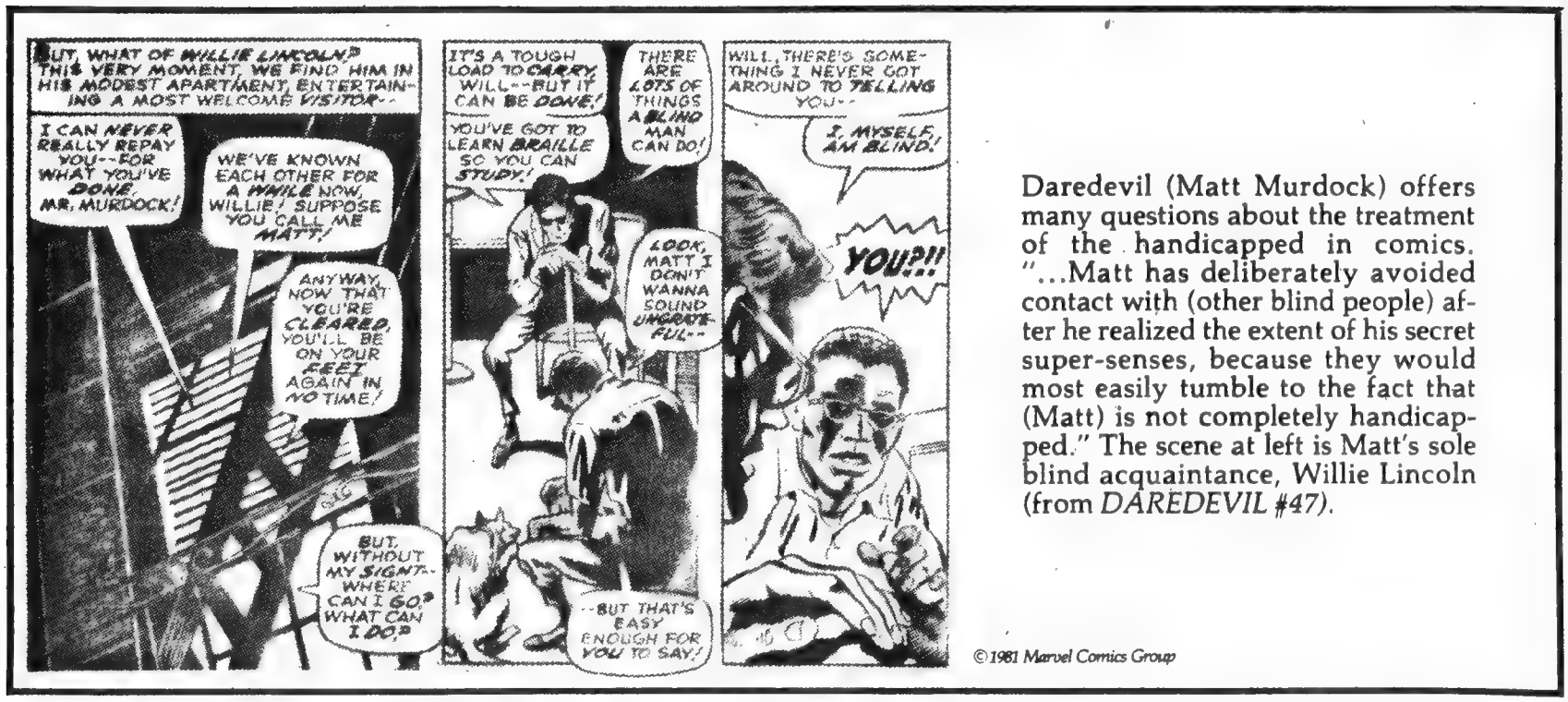
dumb—or mute—**cannot** speak, whereas most deaf persons have simply never learned to articulate. When such persons are removed from the mainstream of our educational institutions and grouped together, the prevailing euphemism terms them a "Special Education" class—a good try at being inoffensive, but unfortunately utilizing a term also applied to classes composed of social incorrigibles, not to mention that it groups the blind and the deaf with the retarded in a sort of "ghetto of the disabled." The United Nations has chosen to call this the Year of the Disabled, and perhaps that's as inoffensive a name as can be coined. The search for fitting terminology has taken the social work profession down some equally strange roads in the opposite direction as well, as when I am informed that my totally deaf coworker and friend is "hearing-impaired," a term which, to me at least, suggests a minor and perhaps correctable hearing defect, which is not the case. For the purposes of this article, I will continue to use the term "handicapped" as a catch-all, and hope not to offend anyone. [As may be obvious, due to the nature of some of their disabilities, the number of handicapped comics collectors may be a minority even tinier than that of other comics readers and creators who are acquainted with the handicapped, so perhaps there are very few in the audience to **be** offended. Needless to say, the author would appreciate hearing from any readers who could disprove this supposition.]

The handicapped characters in comics are, almost entirely, supporting characters—discounting the endless number of blind, mute, or wheelchair-bound characters who have made one-shot appearances in a given strip over the years when the story either required the presence of such a character **because** of his handicap or revolved about him for a single episode, then discarded him forever into limbo. This off-hand use, or rather misuse, of the handicapped character is a result of a major comics writers' disease: handicapped characters, like handicapped persons in real life, make them feel uncomfortable. Since a lot of what passes for differentiating characterization in comics is merely the assignation of a few easy-to-remember adjectives to the character in question, it is easy to see how a writer accustomed to saying, "This is 'A,' he's the leader-type," and "This is 'B,' he's the tough-guy type," or perhaps "This is Dino, he's Italian," and "This is Andre, he's French," could find himself saying, "This is Alicia, she's blind," and letting that be the character's sole distinguishing trait. The problem with the handicapped character, however, is that unlike the "stigma" of foreign ancestry or a macho personality, being blind or deaf or confined to a wheelchair requires an explanation every time the character performs what would, for any other character, be a perfectly ordinary act, but what for him or her is a seeming impossibility. Handicapped characters as regulars are a nuisance; the writer and artist must remember to accord them special treatment. For instance, one would seriously question the presence of a TV set in Alicia Masters' studio/apartment; Charles Xavier's mansion should be equipped with a system of ramps and elevators to facilitate movement via wheelchair; and when the unspeaking Black Bolt issues a command to his Inhuman subjects, the readers should be told precisely how he accomplished same. Naturally, it's easier to write the character out of the strip after one or two appearances, or use him or her only sporadically, than to face these annoying problems every issue.

LATER, BACK HOME...
I CALL THAT MY "ACTION CHAIR!" IT STILL NEEDS A LOT OF WORK -- BUT WITH IT, ONE DAY I'LL BE ABLE TO DANCE A BOSSA NOVA WITH YOU, RITA!
CHIEF, SOMETIMES I THINK YOU'RE THE BIGGEST NUT IN OUR LITTLE FRUIT CAKE! -HA, HA,-
THE End
©1981 DC Comics Inc.

The Chief and his Action Chair; making a handicap into a super-power—or close to one.

Nevertheless, several handicapped characters have graduated to the ranks of regular supporting players in the comics, and a few are even the stars of their own strips. The latter would seem to be an impossibility, since comics are largely the province of the action/adventure character and especially the super-powered costumed hero,and while comics fans can believe in aliens from other planets, mythological gods and goddesses, and ordinary humans whose "secret identities" cloak strange and mysterious abilities, the idea of a handicapped character as protagonist seems beyond the limits of their suspension of disbelief. The "out" usually employed in these cases is to give the handicapped character a super-power which effectively negates his handicap. For instance, Daredevil cannot see, but his heightened other senses and "radar-sense" enable him to equal, and occasionally outperform, his sighted super-comrades. Ditto the earlier blind hero, Doctor Mid-Nite, whose special goggles enabled him to see in the light and who could secretly enjoy perfect vision in the dark. The X-Men's Professor X may not be able to leave his chair, but he possesses men-


BUT, WHAT OF WILLIE LINCOLN? THIS VERY MOMENT, WE FIND HIM IN HIS MODEST APARTMENT, ENTERTAINING A MOST WELCOME VISITOR--
I CAN NEVER REALLY REPAY YOU--FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE, MR. MURDOCK!
WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR A WHILE NOW, WILLIE! SUPPOSE YOU CALL ME MATT!
ANYWAY, NOW THAT YOU'RE CLEARED, YOU'LL BE ON YOUR FEET AGAIN IN NO TIME!
BUT, WITHOUT MY SIGHT--WHERE CAN I GO? WHAT CAN I DO?
IT'S A TOUGH LOAD TO CARRY, WILL--BUT IT CAN BE DONE!
YOU'VE GOT TO LEARN BRAILLE SO YOU CAN STUDY!
THERE ARE LOTS OF THINGS A BLIND MAN CAN DO!
LOOK, MATT, I DON'T WANNA SOUND UNGRATEFUL--
--BUT THAT'S EASY ENOUGH FOR YOU TO SAY!
WILL, THERE'S SOMETHING I NEVER GOT AROUND TO TELLING YOU--
I, MYSELF, AM BLIND!
YOU?!!

Daredevil (Matt Murdock) offers many questions about the treatment of the handicapped in comics. "...Matt has deliberately avoided contact with (other blind people) after he realized the extent of his secret super-senses, because they would most easily tumble to the fact that (Matt) is not completely handicapped." The scene at left is Matt's sole blind acquaintance, Willie Lincoln (from *DAREDEVIL #47*).

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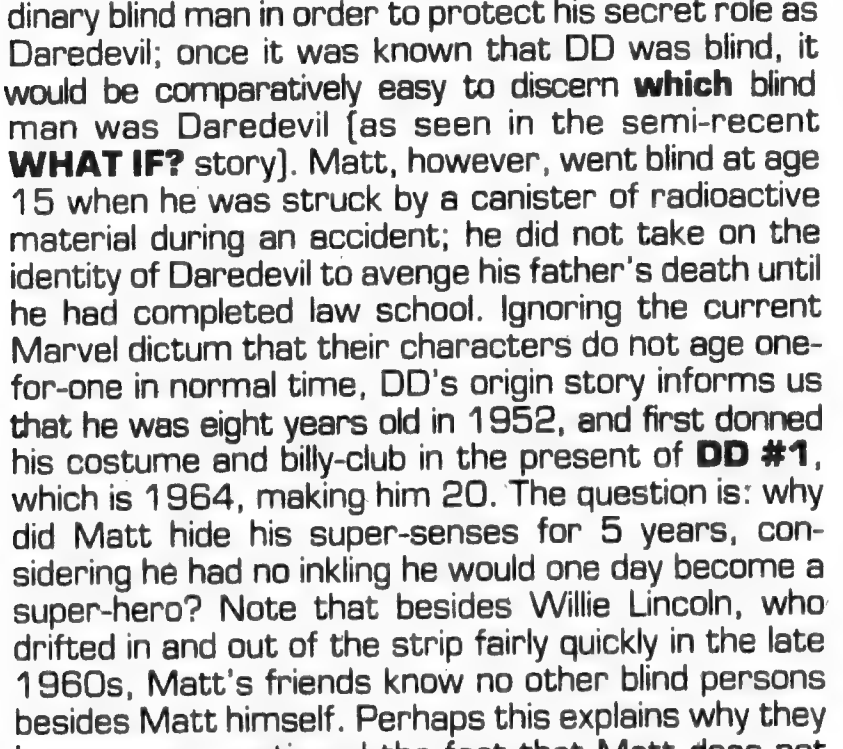
tal powers which are greater than the combined physical abilities of his students. The Doom Patrol's leader, The Chief, overcame his similar plight by use of his genius intellect and by installing a gamut of remote electronic devices, including super-villain-shredding weapons, into his wheelchair. Freddy Freeman may walk with a crutch in his everyday identity, but he has only to say his magic word to be tranformed into the powerful and decidedly not crippled Captain Marvel Junior. [In fact, inasmuch as Freddy and Junior are identical, one wonders why Freddy doesn't just stay Junior permanently and change clothes in a phone booth when he wants to assume his heroic identity, thus ridding himself of his handicap completely.] And of course, The Hulk must qualify as the sole mentally retarded super-character [discounting The Man-Thing, who is wholly mindless], but he copes by dint of his great strength and by occasionally reverting to his human self, the brilliant Doctor Banner. [Has it occurred to anyone, by the way, that aside from the unpredicability of his identity changes, The Hulk's real problem is that he is mentally deficient? This may be a condition of his existentence, as it has been treated by everyone who has ever set typewriter to the strip, but it seems to me that the reason The Hulk's intellect has never advanvanced beyond that of a human toddler is that, laying all the hours and days he has spent in his monstrous identity end-to-end, he has only been sentient as The Hulk [as opposed to being Banner] for a couple of years all told. Given that he has never received any education whatsoever and that he is forever subjected to the shock of awakening to find himself inexplicably transported to new surroundings [after a stint as Banner, an alter ego of which he is unaware], I believe ol' green-skin is a remarkably bright two-year-old.]

By this point, it should be becoming obvious that the range of possible handicaps in comics is a short one. There are three kinds of handicapped characters portrayed in comics: the blind [Daredevil; Alicia; Matt Murdock's friend Willie Lincoln; The Shroud; Doctor Mid-Nite; Ragman's pal Teddy, who is also mute—an interesting idea, but one which requires some explanation], the crippled [wheelchair-bound Professor X; the late Chief of The Doom Patrol; Becky Blake, Matt and Foggy's legal secretary; plus the occasional user of crutches, notably Freddy Freeman; and those amputees not rebuilt Six-Million-Dollar-Man-fashion, such as The Human Fly's hanless engineer/assistant Ted Locke, Spider-Man's one-armed friend Doctor Curt Connors, and Iron Man's acquaintance/alter ego Marty March, and a catch-all group of others [Black Bolt, a sort-of mute who **can** speak but does not dare to because his voice possesses devastating destructive power; the mentally-handicapped Hulk; and a small numbers of others whose afflictions have proven to be temporary and do not fall neatly into the blind or crippled categories]. Sightlessness and the inability to walk have always been the movie-makers' "favorite" handicaps, and so it is with the creators of comics. This would seem to be because these two afflictions are of a highly visible nature, and comics are above all a visual medium. A wheelchair or a missing limb is an obvious visual effect, and a high percentage of the blind characters in comics affect dark glasses and a white cane [the few who don't, such as Alicia, are drawn with eyes that resemble the special contact lenses worn by Keye Luke as blind Master Po in TV's **KUNG FU** or by Bill Bixby as he begins his metamorphosis into TV's Hulk]. The so-called "invisible" handicaps do not so obviously lend themselves to portrayal in comics, and thus are few and far between in their incidence in the comics universe. I put it to the various comics creators that this is highly unrealistic,

and it is one of several un-realisms being perpetrated in comics concerning the handicapped.

Let's look at our first group, the blind characters, using Matt and Alicia as examples. Matt Murdock, like Charles McNider before him, while he is one of my favorite comics characters, is something of a fraud. One could perhaps excuse his posing as an ordinary blind man in order to protect his secret role as Daredevil; once it was known that DD was blind, it would be comparatively easy to discern **which** blind man was Daredevil [as seen in the semi-recent **WHAT IF?** story]. Matt, however, went blind at age 15 when he was struck by a canister of radioactive material during an accident; he did not take on the identity of Daredevil to avenge his father's death until he had completed law school. Ignoring the current Marvel dictum that their characters do not age one-for-one in normal time, DD's origin story informs us that he was eight years old in 1952, and first donned his costume and billy-club in the present of **DD #1**, which is 1964, making him 20. The question is: why did Matt hide his super-senses for 5 years, considering he had no inkling he would one day become a super-hero? Note that besides Willie Lincoln, who drifted in and out of the strip fairly quickly in the late 1960s, Matt's friends know no other blind persons besides Matt himself. Perhaps this explains why they have never questioned the fact that Matt does not act like a typical blind man—because he is not one. As **they** know no other blind people, so Matt knows no other blind people, and this is downright strange. Excluded as they are from the activities of the sighted, blind people tend to spend their leisure time with other blind people, although perhaps not to such a great degree as do the deaf, for reasons we'll get to in a moment. Also, when Matt first became blind, he would have to have been trained in the use of Braille [since he told no one that he didn't need it, and in fact uses Braille law books in his work as a "cover"] and other skills of the sightless. Presumably other blind persons would be involved in this training, if only to mentally and emotionally accustom him to his handicap and to help him adjust. A good guess is that Matt has deliberately avoided contact with these people and other blind people after he realized the extent of his secret super-senses, because they would most easily tumble to the fact that he is not completely handicapped—probably a lot more quickly than his unhandicapped friends, who never even visit him often enough to notice little **faux pas** like the mirror in his bedroom. Each of these little oversights contains the germ of an idea for a **"Daredevil"** story, or at least a sub-plot, which should be explored.


THE SHIP WILL NOT REACH INTERNATIONAL WATERS! I PROMISE YOU THAT!
THE MASKED FIGURE--IT'S PROFESSOR X! THE HOOD MUFFLED HIS VOICE!
BUT, SIR-- YOU'RE WALKING! HOW--?
FOR MONTHS, I HAVE BEEN SECRETLY WORKING ON LIGHTWEIGHT, FLEXIBLE METAL BRACES FOR MY LEGS--AND, AT LAST, I HAVE NEARLY PERFECTED THEM!
THIS TRANSISTORIZED POWER SOURCE, HOOKED ONTO MY BELT, IS ALL THAT I NEED TO OPERATE THEM FOR SEVERAL HOURS AT A TIME!
© 1981 Marvel Comics Group

Professor X's mechanical legs (from *X-MEN* #23).

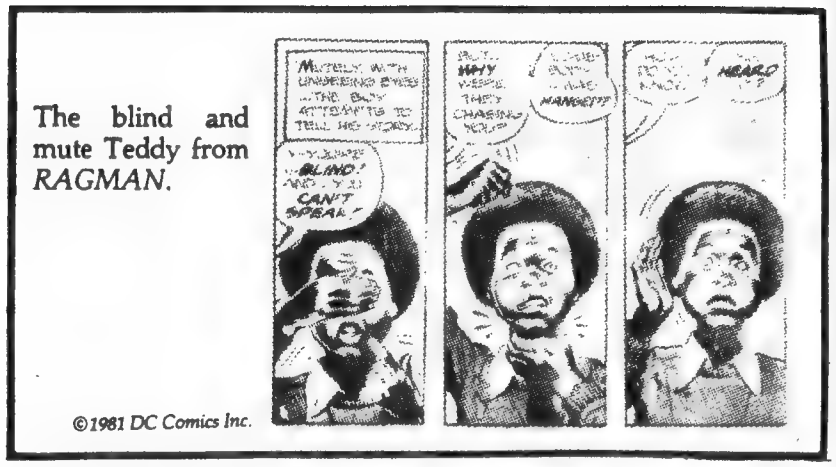
It is a popular conception, or misconception, that the blind automatically gain highly acute hearing and other senses as compensation for their lack of sight; in fact, it is on a fantastic reworking of this idea that the origin of Daredevil is based. In comics, however, even "ordinary" blind persons exhibit amazing skills which, while not in a league with those of DD, would have to be taken with more than a grain of salt in a more realistic medium. Take Alicia Masters, who despite her sightlessness is able to construct elaborate and exact statue replicas of not only her personal friends in the Fantastic Four, but of countless super-heroes and super-villains whom she has never met. A heightened sense of touch is one thing, but to perform such detailed work apparently based solely on descriptions by other people almost qualifies as a super-power in itself. Her skills aside, Alicia suffers from the same problems as Matt Murdock, made more obvious by the fact that she is truly handicapped and not merely "faking it" to hide a double identity. Granted that there is only so much space allowable to give supporting characters a life of their own outside their attachment to the star characters, it seems incredible that after nearly two decades as the **FANTASTIC FOUR** strip's most regular supporting player, Alicia is not known to have any friends other than the FF members, outside of a few associates in the art world, and no blind friends whatsoever. [This may be the least of Alicia's troubles, though; at this writing, new FF writer/artist John Byrne is rumored to be considering her elimination as a regular character. Bad move, Mr. B.]

Our second group, the crippled characters, fare a little better than their blind counterparts. Again, the total lack of handicapped friends seems odd, but is perhaps more easily excused here than in the case of other types of handicaps. Still, the handicap itself tends to be used as a motif or shtick, rather than a part of the character him/herself which colors every aspect of his/her life experience. One wonders why Prof. Xavier has never found time to do any more work on the semi-successful leg-brace he once invented [midway through the old **X-MEN** series], which

actually enabled him to leave his chair and walk for short distances. Most of the amputee characters appear never to have heard of prosthetic limb replacements [bravo to Marv Wolfman for introducing a whole class of such characters who befriend Cyborg in a recent **TEEN TITANS**].

The third, catch-all group is composed of too few examples of any one type of disability to make generalizations. The main criticism to be leveled thereat is its sin of exclusion. We have blind, crippled, and mute characters in a variety of roles in comics, but, with the exception of a couple of walk-on cameo players who were never heard from again, there are absolutely **no deaf characters** in comics whatsoever!

As mentioned earlier, handicaps other than blindness or missing or nonfunctional limbs are not easily dealt with in a visual medium, particularly in a nonmobile visual medium like comics. But does this mean they should be totally ignored? I believe the two main reasons why there has never been a deaf protagonist in comics are that a] no one has ever noticed that it's never been done, and b] no one knows how to do it right. The first problem is herewith solved, so let's deal with the second. Every once in a while, there will appear a comics story devoted to the handicapped, usually lumping in various disabilities in a group as if they were the fabled Three Monkeys [see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil]. In fact, this very motif was used in an early Kid Flash story [infamous for the splash panel in which a thought balloon was transformed into a word balloon and thus gave a supposed mute the power of speech]. Curiously, while most of the handicapped regular characters we have named have been Marvel creations, most of these one-shot handicapped "group" stories have been produced by DC. [Apparently, the corporate entity gets attacks of social conscience at irregular intervals.] At any rate, whether in **"Kid Flash"** or **JUSTICE LEAGUE** or **ALL STAR**, these groups of handicapped persons [almost invariably youngsters, as if the handicapped never survived to reach adulthood] always include one blind kid, one deaf kid, one mute kid, and maybe a few others thrown in for good measure. What seems never to have occurred to anyone involved in these efforts is that not only are those possessing **different** handicaps unlikely to interassociate, unless they suffer from multiple handicaps and thus have one or more in common, but that the deaf kid and the mute kid ought to be combined in a single deaf/mute character. Every one of these few deaf youths, the only deaf characters ever to appear even briefly in comics, could talk up a storm. Simple logic, outside of any personal experience with the deaf, will inform the thinking writer that deaf people, even those who have the ability to do so, don't talk—they use sign language. On the plus side, while their handicap is "invisible" and thus not given to easy portrayal in comics, their means of communicating is highly visible, and even fascinating to watch. On the



The blind and mute Teddy from *RAGMAN*.

©1981 DC Comics Inc.

minus side, the immobility of the comic panel, as opposed to the movie image, works against sign language, in that a single panel could only show part of any complex signed message [although, think what, say, Frank Miller, with his multiple-shot-breakdown technique, could do with a sign language conversation]. This also relates to intercommunication of differently-handicapped persons: obviously, given a more "normal" deaf person—one who does not use the voice which he himself cannot hear but instead uses ASL, or American Sign Language—DC's deaf kid cannot talk to the blind kid, nor vice versa. Imagine that Frank Miller sequence of a moment ago once again: let's say Daredevil finds himself forced to deal with a deaf character. The deaf person can only communicate with the blind Matt/DD as blind/deaf people communicate, by "signing" into the other person's outstretched hand, so he can feel what is being "signed." But since DD has no knowledge of ASL, even this would not work with him, and for once he would be in a situation where his handicap was truly a handicap.This is only a single example of an incident in which a deaf character could appear.

Will we ever see a deaf regular in comics? As mentioned, handicapped characters are a nuisance to writer and artist, and a character whose hand and body movements and facial expressions have to be carefully coordinated with his "dialogue" [perhaps rendered in special balloons to denote that it represents a translation of ASL—which writer and artist would need a small working knowledge of, by the way] would be a real problem—or perhaps, a real challenge!

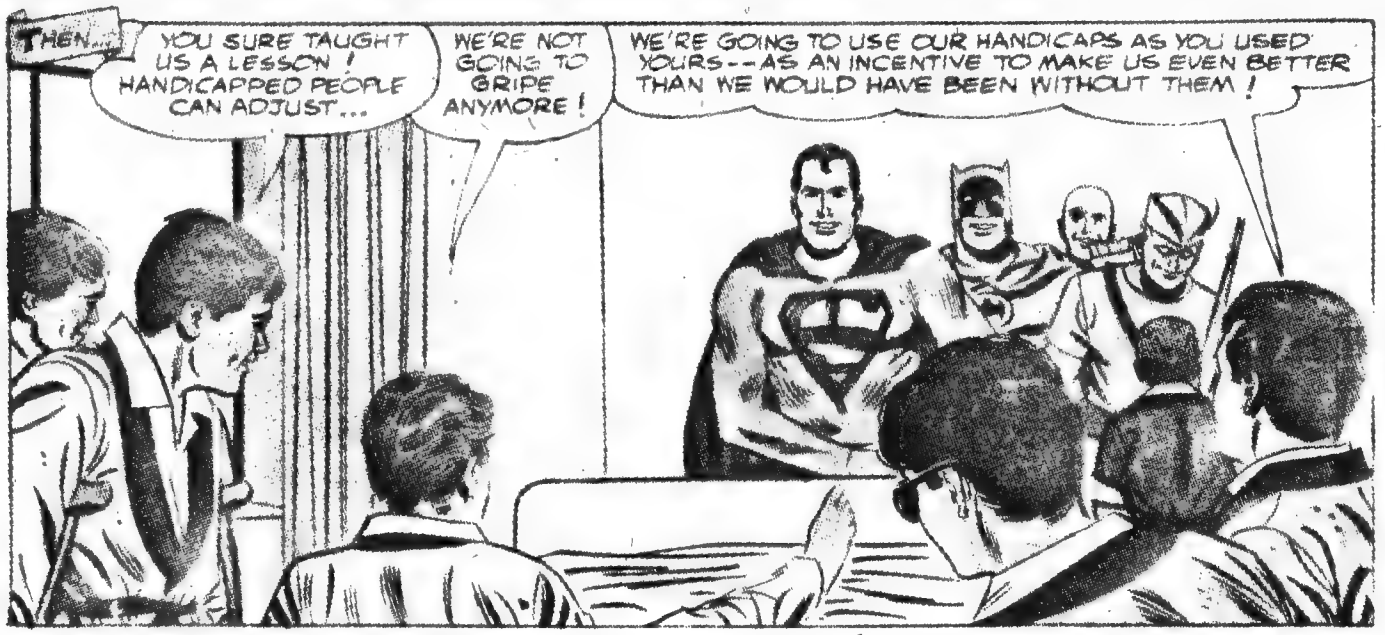
If the concept of a blatantly-flung gauntlet doesn't appeal to anyone, how about this for a reason to use a deaf character or two in comics? Somewhere out there are deaf comics fans who have never had a character with whom to identify. Unlike the blind, who as I have mentioned, must have their comics read to them and thus are probably not a significant percentage among comic readers, the deaf undoubtedly read comics by the carload. Consider: If you found yourself in a world where there were no radios, no stereos, no telephone conversations unless you could afford a very expensive teletype machine [and then, only to talk to your similarly-afflicted friends], no in-person

conversations except with other deaf and those trained in ASL, no movies, and no TV except for a few closed-captioned programs, what would you do? One thing you would do would be to read voraciously, and undoubtably comics would have their place among that reading matter. Wouldn't it be nice to see one character like yourself in all those comics?

As I see it, one of the major problems with the presentation of the handicapped in comics is that the creators don't differentiate between the born-handicapped and the later-become-handicapped. Almost every character used as an example in this article is depicted as having **become** handicapped, either in childhood or in later life. This is useful in terms of story possibilities and dramatic/melodramatic characterization, in that the later-handicapped, who knows what it is like to see, hear, walk, etc. normally, will find the struggle to adjust harder than one who has always been disabled and doesn't fully comprehend what he/she is missing. On the other hand, except in fantastic circumstances such as those of Daredevil's origin, it is perhaps unrealistic to attribute such extensive "extra" compensatory abilities to characters not born with their handicap. I for one was very surprised to learn [in her "origin" story in **MARVEL TEAM-UP #6**] that Alicia had been blinded as a child; from her behavior, I'd have sworn that she was born blind. When introducing a handicapped character, the writer should always have it clear in his own mind, whether or not he so informs the readers, that the character was or was not born with his handicap [in many cases, acquiring the handicap at an extremely early age is nearly identical to being born with it], as it will make a difference in how he reacts to situations in the context of the story.

Perhaps the greatest temptation for the writer, again for the sake of drama/melodrama, is to emulate the movies and TV and turn the handicapped character's story into a tear-jerking romance, usually between the handicapped character and a non-handicapped regular. Before the writer does this, it might be advisable to consider if he has anything other than reworked cliches to add to the plot as presented on the screen. Maybe this is too much to expect of a medium in which every male character is well-built and every female character is a graduate of the Vargas Beauty College, but the odds against a handicapped character being a] physically perfect and attractive in every way, save for his/her disability, **and** b] falling instantly in love with someone who doesn't share that disability, are pretty high. Think about it: despite our terrific unbiased opinions of ourselves, aren't a lot of our perceptions based on our sensory concepts of "attractive"? Therefore, could you really imagine yourself falling for someone whom you'd never seen, or who would never see you, or with whom you couldn't carry on a conversation, or who would never hear your voice? It's not impossible, but if presented, the inherent problems should be considered and dealt with, successfully or not, by the characters in the story.

No doubt someone out there is saying to himself, "Well, if most of us have gone through our whole lives thus far and not met any handicapped people, there can't really be too many of them, so maybe there shouldn't be any more in comics than there already are, so as not to present a percentage out of line with the real ratio of handicapped-to-non-handicapped people." Ah, but remember: one of the inaccuracies of the portrayal of the handicapped in comics is that they are not shown to associate with others of like disability. There are a lot of them, friends; the reason you haven't met them is that they've been keeping to themselves. You're never going to find them if you don't go looking for them... and that goes for real life and comics alike.


THEN...
YOU SURE TAUGHT US A LESSON! HANDICAPPED PEOPLE CAN ADJUST...
WE'RE NOT GOING TO GRIPE ANYMORE!
WE'RE GOING TO USE OUR HANDICAPS AS YOU USED YOURS--AS AN INCENTIVE TO MAKE US EVEN BETTER THAN WE WOULD HAVE BEEN WITHOUT THEM!
©1981 DC Comics Inc.

The Justice League inspire a wardful of handicapped youngsters in *JUSTICE LEAGUE #36.*

HOLLYWOOD, late 1977. The office of Dino De Lasagna.

I'm bored! There must be some new property that can be levelled. Eh? What's this?

AWFUL TITANKILLER Whale

BING BONG MONKE

TAP

DINO

GROVEL CRAWL WHIMPER CRAWL

KICK ME

Oh, just a property that's been around for years. You know—rocket ships, robots, damsels in distress. Just like ***STAR WARS***.

FLASH GORDON

Hmmm. Just like ***STAR WARS***...

YES! Bigger than ***STAR WARS!*** I'll do this property, yes—and yet...I like to play with things awhile before I destroy them!!

We join our heroes on the planet ***ZONGO***...

Hey! This isn't the Jets training camp!! Where's Pete Rozell?! You've got a lot of explaining to do, mister.

In all my years as a travel agent, I ***never***... This place makes Burbank look like Shangri-La! If you think I'm opening an office out ***here***, forget it, Jack!

You fail to understand, my unwilling guests. We are on the planet Zongo—yes, ***this*** planet is a grave threat to Earth and ***I, Doctor Notta Zookov, kidnapped you to aid me in my rescue mission.***

All clear? Okay, on with the special effects!

FLUSH

NY JETS

WHEN IT RAINS.. IT' POURS TM

WELCOME TO ZONGO A NICE PLACE TO LEAVE YOUR CHILDREN! POPulation: NASTY!

OUCH!

PLEASE WIPE FEET BEFORE LIFT OFF!

MIT

HEY! YOU BIGGA SLOB

HANDY WIPE

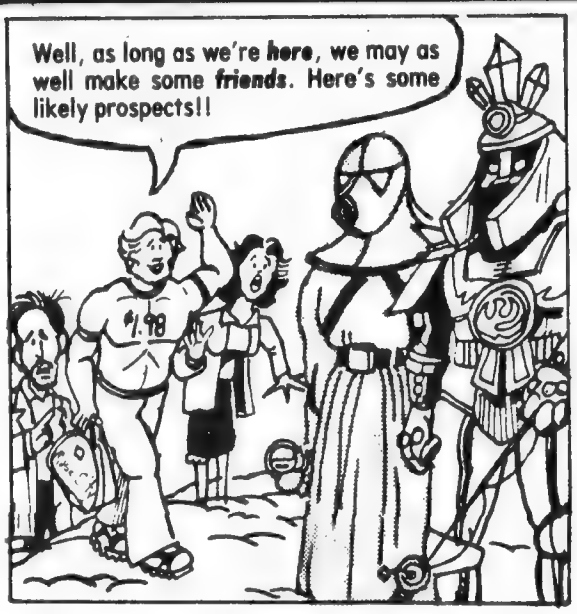
DON'T LITTER

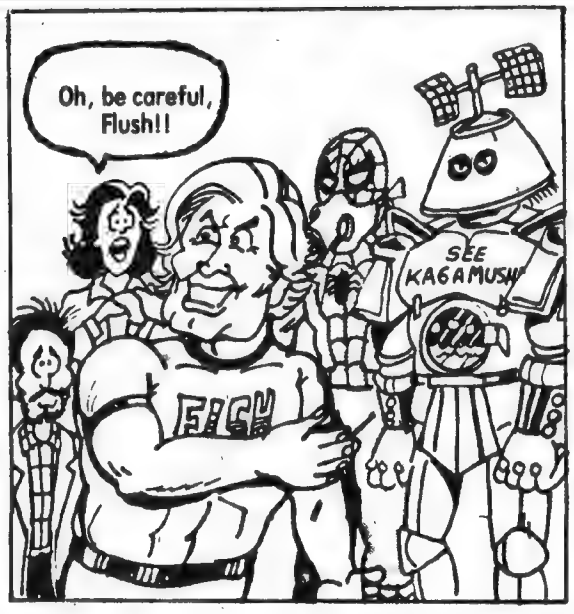
TOM LINDMAN '81

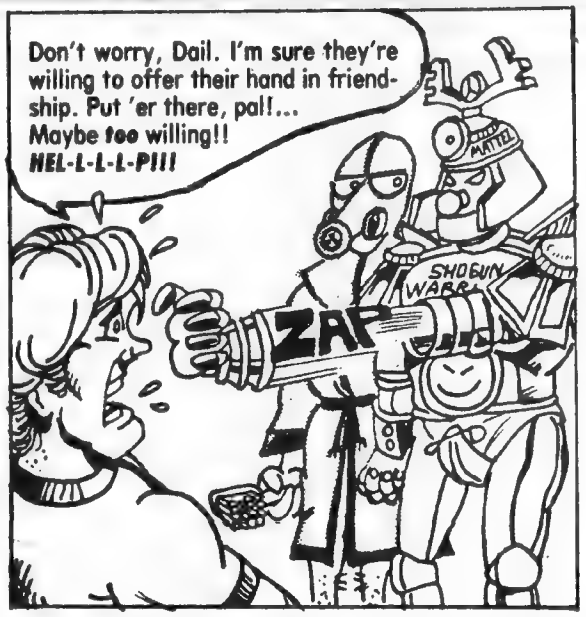
FLUSH GOING!

WHEN IN HOLLYWOOD VISIT DINO-VERSAL CITY STUDIOS!

Tom Linehan is a professional cartoonist whose work has appeared in *COMICS FEATURE, THE SCIENCE FICTION TIMES,* and *SUPER NEWS.*






Don't worry, Dail. I'm sure they're willing to offer their hand in friendship. Put 'er there, pal!... Maybe **too** willing!!
HEL-L-L-L-P!!!
ZAP
SHOGUN WARRIOR

Thank you, thank you. You're marvelous, ladies and peons. We have a big, ***big*** show for you tonight: ***not*** only do we have The Three Pathetic Earthlings, but also Zoltan and his trained Bird-People, Charo Fria Gabor...

What is it, Aurats?

Go away, kid—ya bodder me!

Daddee, I ***want*** it! I want the ***Earthling***— the BIG ONE, ***Puh-leeeze?***

WHEEL OF CHANCE

RETURN TO BETTE DAVIS

And now, without any further ado... here they are doing their rendition of that science fiction standard, ***"A Plea for Peace and Understanding!"***

Take it away, ***Pathetic Earthlings!!***

I know. You're probably asking yourselves, "Why should we spare those Pathetic Earthlings? Well, believe it or not, we have our uses. How many Pathetic Earthlings would you say it took to screw in a lightbulb? That depends on whether Zing's secret planetary death ray wipes us all out. But seriously, folks...

Oh, Flush, it's no use! I can hear them breathing!

SPACE CADET

Enough of this foolishness!! Bring the foxy Earth woman to me!

I know, Dail. Zookov's delivery would mesmerize a bull elephant in its tracks.

THUMP!

Let's disco tonight, babee!!

GLEEP!

FLUSH...

WHOAA!! LET'S ALL DISREGARD THE PLOT

Sound Track by Queen

FLUSH! WHOAAA!! A PLOT THAT'S RIDICULOUS!!

RINSE

DRY

FLUKE

49's

MEMO

MAGNETO HELMET OFF

FLUSH! WHOAAA!! MY GOD, WHAT AN IMBECILE!!

SNORT

TILT

FLUSH! WHOAAA!! HE'S THE HOPE OF THE UNIVERSE

GO, FLUSH, GO, GO, FLUSH, GO!

EARTH

WHOOAA!! QUICK! DO A TURN-AROUND! --oops!

BONK!

FALL

Well, there you have it Typus, a stunning defeat for the planet Earth! My plot to destroy their puny planet has been voted Most Valuable Plot, *and* I've got a sponsor for next season!

Rightio, your most awful majesty! And now a break for invasion identification. Then, back to our war game in progress.

Zongo 517
Earth 0

MEMO

Meanwhile...

So what's Zing going to do with the defeated Earthlings now? He's conquered this one utterly!

Guards! Take the defeated Earthling to the lowest dungeons! It's time for the false "death" scene!

Gee, I'm glad someone knows what's going on here!

And sure enough...

Before they send you off to your death, Flush, I have to tell you that I don't blame you—millions of Earth people will die because of you, but you did your best! Zing will conquer the universe because of your incompetence, but you shouldn't feel guilty! You'll never again star in a major motion picture, but ***don't feel bad!***

AUNTIE 'EM,... AUNTIE 'EM!

Zing! Get this dame outta here—she's comforting me to death!!

Well, big boy, this is your last chance. What will it be—a horrible death or complete and total ecstacy?

ROYAL THRONE

How can I decide? If I choose death, I'll die! If I choose you, poor Dail will be heartbroken. I can hear her wailing for me now...

OH, FLUSH!

No, Dail!! ***Don't say THAT!***

FLUSH! WHOOAAHHH!

Heh heh! Glad to oblige!

With Flush down the drain, Zing devotes his attention to Dail and Dr. Zookov. Dail will join his harem, and Dr. Z is to be ***brainwashed...***

PURÉE
CHOP
DICE

All is going as planned, Typus. These old ***"Flash Gordon"*** serials make great propaganda weapons against the Earthlings!

Yes, Kalevala—and not only that, but they're quite ***entertaining!*** They don't write 'em like that anymore!

THE ADVENTURES OF FLASH GORDON

CHAPTER SIX

Meanwhile, Flush has been secretly rescued by Zing's daughter ***Aurats***, who insists that a grateful Flush ***make love*** to her. Then...

I have a collect telepathetic message for Mr. Going. Will you accept?

Er...uh, yes, operator.

Damn! I knew I should have gotten call waiting!!

Oh, Flush, I'm locked in Zing's ***boudoir*** and I'm ***sure*** his intentions are ***not honorable!!*** What should I ***do?***

Don't get ***flustered***, Dail! Just think of Zing as an ordinary ***New York mugger!***

Don't try and get fresh with ***me***, you creep! One step closer and I bring out the ***machete***, the ***burp gun***, and the ***portable police siren!!***

Miss Garden, for a harem girl, I think you lack a certain ***team spirit!***

For safekeeping, Aurats delivers Flush to Auroria, domain of ***Borin***, her ***insanely jealous lover...***

Hel-l-l-p!!

So you'll take care of my new ***paramour***, won't you, Borin, sweetie?

You can count on me, Aurats. I'll preserve his remains...I mean I'll see to his ***every need.*** We'll start with a ***scenic tour*** of the ***Forbidden Swamp!***

Flush is imprisoned in Borin's wooden prison, waiting (again) for his execution...

Y'know, there are times when I ***seriously question*** Awrat's ***judgment!***

Dail and Dr. Z escape from Zongo and seek allies with the Hawkmen.

Zookov, I think we're ***here!***

Earthlings, why should we believe that ***you*** are our allies in the fight against Zing?

Well, hey, we escaped from his fortress! He was going to kill us, and, uh...

Watch it, Doc. They're getting nasty!

Attention! All of Zongo is commanded to look out for two escaped Earthlings. They are not particularly dangerous, but your ruler, Zing, is mighty honked off at them both!

And now, back to our program of uninterrupted muzak...

See, Volga? There was our proof, back in the last panel!

He's still not convinced! If only Flush were here!

Meanwhile, Flush, disguised as a piece of pine, escapes from Borin's lumberyard..

One way out of a ***knotty*** problem! Heh heh!

Tourists!

OH BOY! FOOD!!!

WELCOME TO Birdland!

Borin, though, catches up with the fugitive captive in the Hawkmen's aerial city...

...and I challenge you to a duel to the death, Earthling gigolo!

BEEFCAKE

But Borin, what do you expect from an actor recruited from ***The Mating Game?***

By the way, my compliments to your tailor.

Oh, Flush, when Dr.Zookov saw the floating aero-discs used in Zongo duels, he went ***berserk!***

It's worse than I could have forseen, Dail! He thinks it's ***dinner theatre in-the-round!!***

EXIT STAGE LEFT

♪ IF I WERE A RICH MEN, DYE DYE ♪

Listen to that, Going: the crowd grows wild!! Only your death will appease them.

How about if we refunded their admission money for this movie, Borin?

DOOMED

Haha! Hoho! I've got you now! There's only one thing on Zongo deadlier than the tournaments, and that's...***oh, NO!*** It's ***them!!***

It's ***what?*** Don't just leave me on pins and needles, Borin, old boy!

It's...***THE BORE WORMS!!***

c'mon along and listen to ♪ The Slug-a-beds of Zon-go ♪

Sluga Sluga

HIT IT!

We got orders to take you two back for ***Zing's wedding!***

In the ensuing melee, Dail is captured, Aurats is captured, and Zing prepares to destroy Earth once and for all...

B-but ***Who's*** Zing ***marrying?***

You, schweetheart!

Oh, ***NO!***

To celebrate his wedding to Dail, Zing plans to destroy both Earth and Flush...

MEMBER OF THE MORAL MAJORITY OF ZONGO CHAPTER 17

Miss Garden will make a fine wife. After all—I'm 800 years old—it's time I settled down!

12

Will Flush be able to save Dail, himself, Dr. Zookov, the Earth, and this movie?!??

No, Flush!

Don't try and stop me, Volga. I've got to save Dail...the Earth...my movie debut...

FANTASY LAND

Oh, sure! Go ahead! I just wanted to tell you that Zing's palace is the ***other way!!***

Also, your dime's almost run out!

Here's the plan, Volga: your Hawkmen will run interference for me, deflecting Zing's deadly ray-gun fire, while I come in from behind, save the day, and claim all the credit. How do[illegible] that sound to you?

My friend, it sounds like a plan that we would not have ***dared*** try ***ourselves!***

That's why you Hawkmen needed a ***real leader!*** C'mon, let's go! I can hear the music starting!

There go the last of the Hawkmen—now it's time for my ***big death dive*** through Zing's ***picture window!!***

I only hope I'm in time to save Dail from her fate ***worse than death***—marrying someone ***other than me!!***

AJAX

AJAX

Flush crashed into the palace! While he keeps Zing busy, ***we*** can sabotage the ***planetary death ray!***

That's sort of a ***watered-down*** ending, don't you think—oops!

I should'n'a said that!

AIEEEE!! I'm MELTING! I'm MELTING! Wotta life!

Your plot is foiled, Zing! You should have stayed in your ***artsy foreign movies***, where, if nothing else, the ***clods don't win!***

KLOROX NEEDED HERE

Aw, c'mon, Going, you don't seriously believe that I'd dress for my weddin' without including my invulnerability shield and my killer zap-ring, do you?

ZAP!

After all, ***you*** know Miss Garden, too.

Hey! What's going ***on*** here?!? ***That*** wasn't in the script! I ***demand*** to know who's ***sabotaging*** my movie!!

It was only his head. Can't we shoot ***around*** it?

You mean ***my*** movie, director!

DIRECTOR

I stopped ***FLUSH GOING***..

WAAH!

IN MOURNIN'

B-but, Mr. De Lasagna, why would you want to stop production in your ***own*** multi-million dollar epic??

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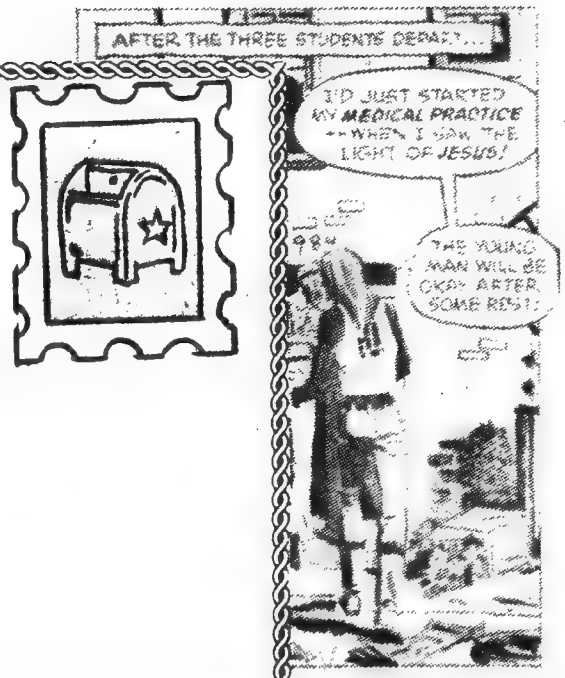
AFTER THE THREE STUDENTS DEPART...
I'D JUST STARTED MY MEDICAL PRACTICE --WHEN I SAW THE LIGHT OF JESUS!
THE YOUNG MAN WILL BE OKAY AFTER SOME REST!

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GOD AND MAN IN COMIC BOOKS

PART TWO

If God's face indeed never changes, then it can be no less true that no two men see the same visage. But religious beliefs as a whole alter and are re-tailored in every era, with the vicissitudes of economics, politics, wars, scientific and communicational breakthrough, and other social upheavals.

So it was in comic books, when they glanced at God in the 1970s.

Last time we looked into the treatment accorded God—specifically, Yahweh, the most popular deity in the United States, the country which publishes most of the world's comics—and religion in comics from the 1940s through the 1960s. Spiritual matters, as per the dictates of the Comics Code, were handled gingerly and respectfully, or not at all.

Then came the showdown, in early 1971: **AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #96-98**. Stan Lee was determined to see a three-part story through which dealt with drug abuse, and, when the Code refused to grant him permission, put the books out without their seal of approval. The books sold. Comics Code officials were forced to revamp their standards. 1971 was, after all, about seventeen years removed from **SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT,** and the apocalyptic 1960s had loosened the boundaries of everybody's consciousness, including that of eight-year-old comics buyers. Seduction could be implied. Vampires and werewolves were no longer taboo. You could write "damn" or "hell" into a script as curses, not as proper terms, and nobody would blue-pencil you. And you could deal with religion, as long as you maintained a thin patina of "taste"; your opinions, moreover, **need not be favorable.**

1971 was a year in which the "Jesus Movement" was still alive, before it fluttered out in a flurry of day-glo crosses. Mostly, though, Marvel and DC still handled religion peripherally. There was, of course, a Jack Kirby title called **THE NEW GODS**, but the heroes were no more objects of worship than Marvel's Thor. [This, despite the fact that their leader was named Izàya—pronounced Isaiah—and Kirby adapted The Source, a disembodied hand that writes words of advice on a wall, from the Book of Daniel.] Neal Adams and Denny O'Neil, in **GREEN LANTERN/ GREEN ARROW #89,** used a Christ "look-alike" named Joshua [a form of the name Jesus] and had him expire while tied to an SST wing in a cruciform position. Roy Thomas, in **CONAN #3**, adapted a Robert E. Howard story which originally dealt with Odin's passing from the world's influence when Christian warriors slew his last believers, though in the Marvel version both Norse and Hebrew religions were changed and the main thrust of the tale was anti-war, rather than pro-paganism.

Probably the first writer to tackle religion head-on in 1971 was Mike Friedrich, in an almost-forgotten Robin tale. Friedrich, a deeply idealistic young scribe who probably couldn't have written a story back then without philosophizing if a gun had been held to his head, tackled Jesus People in **BATMAN #239**, in a story called **"Soul-Pit."** Robin and surrogates of Gerry Conway, Berni Wrightson and Alan Weiss stalked past the doorways of Gotham's Bleeker Street, past a sign that reads "Jesus Saves," until "Gerry" attempted to put the make on a gorgeous redhead wearing a sweatshirt reading "JESUS IS MY LORD." The girl confrontes "Conway" with:

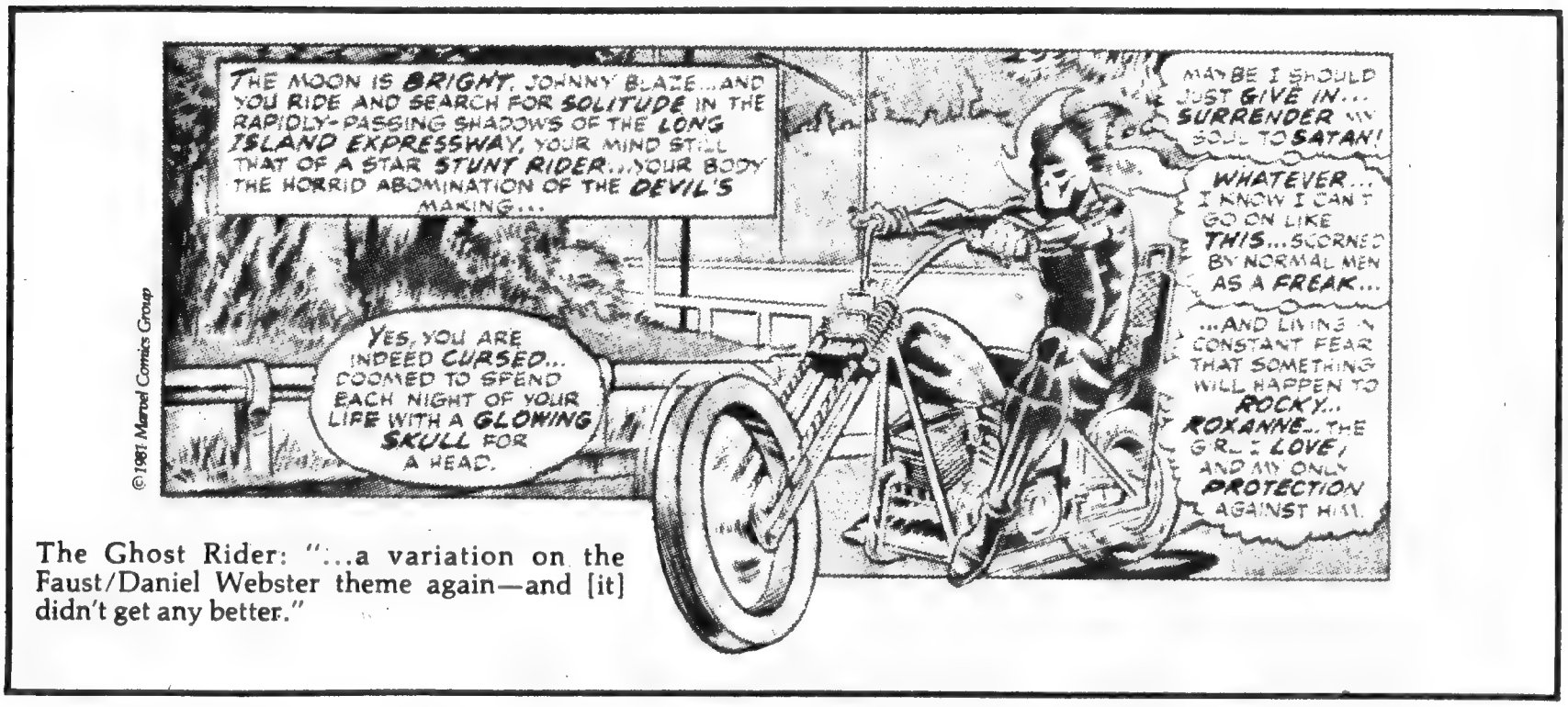
"Have you been saved, brother?"

"Huh?" puzzles Gerry.

"Can you get behind facing God and asking His forgiveness?"

"Er—uh—"

The girl punctuated her message with a finger pointed towards his collarbone. "The risen Jesus loves you and wants you to love Him! Can you dig it, brother?"


THE MOON IS BRIGHT, JOHNNY BLAZE...AND YOU RIDE AND SEARCH FOR SOLITUDE IN THE RAPIDLY-PASSING SHADOWS OF THE LONG ISLAND EXPRESSWAY, YOUR MIND STILL THAT OF A STAR STUNT RIDER...YOUR BODY THE HORRID ABOMINATION OF THE DEVIL'S MAKING...
YES, YOU ARE INDEED CURSED... DOOMED TO SPEND EACH NIGHT OF YOUR LIFE WITH A GLOWING SKULL FOR A HEAD.
MAYBE I SHOULD JUST GIVE IN... SURRENDER MY SOUL TO SATAN!
WHATEVER... I KNOW I CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS...SCORNED BY NORMAL MEN AS A FREAK...
...AND LIVING IN CONSTANT FEAR THAT SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN TO ROCKY... ROXANNE... THE GIRL I LOVE, AND MY ONLY PROTECTION AGAINST HIM.
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The Ghost Rider: "...a variation on the Faust/Daniel Webster theme again—and [it] didn't get any better."

"Er... later, girl... much later..." gulped Gerry, backing off. And, though Robin opined, "With the world the shape it's in, maybe the Jesus People are right," on the next page Friedrich drove his point home even further. A young man sitting on a bench is seen surrounded by three Jesus People in crosses and "One Way" jackets, bent on converting him. When the "Convertee" exploded, "No **Jesus**—gonna solve **my** troubles!" and slugged one of the believers, the token black of the group drew back a balled fist. "Brother Thomas didn't deserve getting hit!" he snapped. "We **chosen** are called to knock aside the enemies of the faith—"

At that point, Robin grabs the black's wrist. A donnybrook ensues, with Robin's friends joining the fray, and, though one Jesus Person proclaims "We fight in the name of The **Lord**!", the overzealous Faithful are subdued. However, as Gerry prepares to angrily punch the Jesus People's ringleader, Robin restrains him: "Mere words never deserve a punch in the mouth!" The Christian calls off his cohorts, proclaiming "Violence is **not** the way of our **Lord**!" And, after Brother Charles, the black, is reproved for causing "bad vibes," he admits "I-I was wrong! May the **Lord Jesus** forgive me..."

It wasn't a bad way to start out the 1970s. **"Soul Pit"** was basically a harkening back to the Fox and Broome "tolerance" tales of the 1960s, examining the dangers inherest in religious fanaticism and conversion by force. To this day, it remains one of the few comics stories dealing with the evangelism question in anything resembling an objective manner. For **that**, Friedrich deserves praise indeed... because Marvel Comics was about to take on Christian symbolism as nothing more than a plot element, and eventually religion wound its way into virtually **every** Marvel series.

And practically none of them had anything good to say about it!

GHOST RIDER, Gary Friedrich's semi-clone of his Skywald hero **HELL-RIDER**, may have been the first. To save his cycle-stunting mentor "Crash" Simpson from death by disease, young Johnny Blaze pokes around in some old books and finds a surefire spell that will call up Satan. When the Adversary arrives, Johnny promises him "eternal servitude" if he will spare "Crash" from the disease which threatens his life. Satan does just that—but makes sure that "Crash" dies anyway, in a motorcycle jump. Johnny, thoroughly put out, is visited again by Satan, who drops in to give him the powers of The Ghost Rider, a skull-faced, hellfire-shooting demon-hero.

The story premise was more than a little trite—a variation of the Faust/Daniel Webster theme again—and didn't get any better. Mainly, the problem was—how does a super-hero whose powers are derived from Satan end up fighting for good **against** The Devil, in each and every issue? There was a devil-cult in just about every backyard in the **"Ghost Rider"** series, and, not having a lawyer of Webster's stature to argue his case in court, Johnny Blaze had to fight 'em all. When the Devil first came to take his soul, Roxanne Simpson ["Crash"'s daughter], just a plain, everyday American girl, flings herself unfearingly between her boyfriend and the Prince of Darkness. "Back, o foul denizen of the depths! As the cross is to a vampire... so is the presence of one pure in heart to **you**! Disappear, I command you! Or the forces of good within me... will **destroy you!**" Well, Satan surely couldn't argue with **that** logic, so he skedaddles back to Hell double-time, swearing vengeance. After a spate of adventures in which it seems that Roxanne isn't as devil-proof as

we thought, and Ghost Rider battles Satanists of exotic stripe [Indians and pretty girls in hotpants and halters], he nearly gets it. Satan clutches the helpless Rider in his slimy grasp, ready to cart him back to Down Under. Just then, a mysterious figure intervenes... a figure dressed in blue jeans and work shirt ... a figure in long hair and a beard, who can command The Devil to obey irresistably... yep, you guessed it, the Superstar himself sets Johnny Blaze free, with all his Satanic powers intact, and everybody who recognizes this tawdry invocation of **deus ex machina** for what it is is guaranteed a devil-proof No-Prize!

It wasn't a **total** loss, though. Another strip spun off from **GHOST RIDER**, one which would quickly become one of the best series of the the mid-1970s. Born of the frenzy following the movie version of **THE EXORCIST, MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #12** drew up the curtain on Daimon Hellstrom, **THE SON OF SATAN.**

In his premiere adventure, Hellstrom—bare-chested, with pentagram birthmark on his chest and brandishing a trident which invited comparisons with Hot Stuff—mounted a sky-drawn chariot drawn by three satanic steeds and, fully as evil as he was good and prone to demonic rages, crashed into Hell to save Johnny Blaze and a reformed villainess. After Daimon confronts his dad and sneeringly comments on the Devil's "mental deterioration" and hints that Satan might just be getting **old**, it is revealed that the trident Daimon wields is made of Netheranium, a sort of hellish Kryptonite that can strip the powers from the Devil. After a donnybrook in which the Son of Satan defeats the hordes of Hell single-handed, Daddy admits "For the moment, I am at your mercy—yet I am **proud**! You are **truly** my son!" and vows to oppose Daimon as well as Johnny, as the three of them make for higher ground.

Next issue's origin story, also by Gary Friedrich, gave us the lowdown on Satan's offspring. After Daimon procures his late mother's diary, he learns that Satan came to earth some twenty to thirty years back, in search of a wife. [Actually, Satan is supposed to be a sexless **spirit**, but like the legendary incubi, Marvel gave him the ability to sire children. Big of them.] He emerges from Hell on earth, like a Human Torch with wings, and then transforms himself into "the most handsome man any earthly woman had ever seen!", resembling nothing so much as the Sub-Mariner. He proceeds to marry Victoria Hellstrom, sires Daimon and then Satana [and the **name** should have been a dead giveaway to Mrs. H!], and, some years later, is surprised by his wife when she finds her husband and daughter in the basement, about to carve up a cat! The Devil reveals himself, driving Victoria insane until shortly before her death. Satana grows up and becomes a thoroughly disgusting person who walks around sucking souls out of people's mouths.

In the meantime, as fate and Scripter's Irony would have it, Daimon Hellstrom has gone off to a monastery to enter the priesthood. After his mother dies, he inherits their house, discovers the diary, and is summoned by Satan to a meeting in Hell to consider becoming a member of the board. Daimon replies by snatching his father's trident, stealing his chariot, and escaping. Altogether, the two-part tale easily ranked with the best of **GHOST RIDER** in theological profundity.

That lack of depth was pitched to Gehenna with the next issue, when a new scripter by the name of Steve Gerber took over **SON OF SATAN**. Finally, an intellectual scripter with an excellent writing style to match had taken on a super-hero strip with religious underpinnings. Gerber, learned in the Talmud, the Tarot, Satanism, Christianity, Judaism, and myths and legends of all stripes, as well as philosphy and good old super-heroic confrontation, revitalized Daimon Hellstrom as no Netheranium trident ever could have.

First, the hellborn hero's nature changed; no longer was he a day/night transformer as the original Hulk had been, but, like the later Hulk, his demonic, evil self and his good side were always in opposition, and only vigilant self-control kept his evil self in control. Secondly, Satan turned up less directly in the series, usually working through minions and using devious schemes to entrap Daimon mentally, rather than physically. [Gerber was fond of using religious trappings to mask demonic forces. In **SPOTLIGHT #15**, Hellstrom battled a meteor-riding monk who unleashed fireblasts from his hands. In the same issue, the Devil and Daimon enacted a nigh-blasphemous parody of the Sistine Chapel ceiling detail of God creating Adam. In issue **#22**, while a priest recited the first verses of Genesis, a toad-demon sat on his shoulders and parodied Satanically every word: "In

IN ON THE A BEGINNING MIDDLE
GOD SATAN CREATED CHEWED THE
A HEAVEN PIG AND WITHOUT THE
A EARTH MOTHER. NOW THEN THE
A EARTH PIG WAS IS UNFORMED
UNIFORMED AND BUT VOID ARMED.
STOP!!!
1981 Marvel Comics Group

Religious trappings for demonic forces, from Gerber's *SON OF SATAN*.

on the **a** beginning **middle** God **Satan** created **chewed** the **a** heaven **pig** and **without** the **a** earth **mother**..." When Daimon blasted the apparition with his trident, the priest turned out to be illusion; the demon, real. And in **#23**, Gerber's last, an Angel of the Lord who opposed the Son of Satan turned out to be another demon under the makeup.] Gerber's fine, satirical talents pitted Satan's heir against a living Tarot deck, Atlantean cults, a gigantic, cosmic

ON YOUR KNEES, DOGS! YOU STAND IN THE PRESENCE OF YOUR MASTER--
--AND HIS SON!
SATAN-- IN HIS INCARNATION AS BAPHOMET, THE GOAT-HEADED DEMON SYMBOLIZED BY THE INVERTED STAR!
© 1981 Marvel Comics Group

In *"The Son of Satan"* series, Satan turned up "more or less directly."

flame-dragon, a demoness that hopped from body to body before she could be exorcised, a Legion of Nihilists, and, best of all, Adam himself, transformed into the guardian of a giant atom, and "made to bear the pain of every transgression since his own... and to wear that agony upon his visage," until his face resembled a participant in a 17-car pileup. Though Gerber never took on conventional Christianity as such, he **did** include in his cast one Byron Hyatt, a student priest and Jimmy Olsen figure who was more than a little nervous about consorting with the devil's offspring. Hyatt, alas, never received more than token treatment.

Though a few religionists were offended by the idea of the Devil's own as a super-hero and made their views know in the lettercolumn [as did more than a few Satanists, who usually **liked** the series], Gerber, when literally accused of being a tool of the Devil, replied "I am not a tool of anybody... Not even Irving Forbush, for crying out loud!" and wrote:

"Want to know who I think is doing Satan's work on earth, folks?

"Anyone who asks us to close our minds to any possiblity in the universe!"

"God is alive. God is dead. God is in hibernation until spring. God is vacationing in Andromeda. God is withing us all—even in the Devil's own son! I can't tell you which of those to believe. You've got to make up your **own** minds. And that you deserve the right to shape **your** own beliefs is **my** own strongest belief!

"...Better, though, to panic at the air we can't breathe, populations that won't stop growing, desert wars that could trigger nuclear holocausts, and onrushing crises in food and energy that nobody wants to admit... than at a comic book."

To which we can only add, Steve, with no irony intended: Amen.

THE SON OF SATAN lost Gerber, gained its own book, and, afflicted with more traditional devil-tales [save for a last issue exquisitely drawn **a la** Hieronymous Bosch by Russ Heath], went to the Pit after the eighth issue. Gerber got his hands on Hellstrom once more, in a series that would eventually totally eclipse **THE SON OF SATAN**... but we'll deal with that later.

Gerber had dealt with religion beforehand, though only peripherally, when he introduced a new foe for Daredevil and the Black Widow—The Dark Messiah. In this story, plotted by Gerry Conway, an injured acrobat gets otherworldly treatments by a Mysterious Figure [later revealed as Moondragon], and emerges as a fanatically religious super-villain, endowed with powerful eyebeams. SInce he has recovered from a potentially fatal injury, i.e., "risen from the dead," the acrobat believes himself to be a new Christ-figure. With a Dare**devil** as a convenient foil, The Dark Messiah recruits an army of criminal "believers" and takes over Golden Gate Park in San Francisco as his "holy land." After DD convinces his foe that he is, in reality, nothing more than a kid who used to do gymnastic stunts and pass the hat, The Dark Messiah embarrassedly self-destructs.

But Gerber's most profound use of religion in a comic book plot came in 1974, in a two-part **MAN-THING** story which introduced the ultimate vigilante, The Foolkiller. Clad in the uniform of a futuristic buccaneer, The Foolkiller wielded a powerful raygun—"the purification blast"—which was nothing less than "the energy of the **just** and **righteous**." His avocation: spot-testing for fools, and destroying anyone who did not choose the path of "salvation." To notify his victims that they were on the spot, The Foolkiller passed out a business card reading:

FOOLKILLER
—E Pluribus Unum—

You have 24 hours to live. Use them to repent—or be forever damned to the pits of Hell, where goeth all fools. Today is the last day of the rest of your life. Use it wisely—**or die a fool!**

After totally destroying a couple of motorcycle hoods and threatening to murder series regulars F.A. Schist [for trying to drain the swamp], Richard Rory [for playing rock music on a radio station] and The Man-Thing [for creating the serum which made him the monster], The Foolkiller relaxes in the back of a huge transport truck by talking to the corpse of a minister, preserved in a huge glass tube full of formaldehyde.

Born a cripple, The Foolkiller-to-be lost both parents to war, became enamored of things military, and was taken by his grandmother to faith healer "Reverend Mike." After the evangelist lays hands on the youth, he is miraculously cured. No alien beings from Titan accomplish this—such cures so occur in real life, as author Gerber tacitly acknowledges, and, whether the healing comes "down from God or up from within Man," the ex-cripple leaves his wheelchair and **walks**.

"I begged you to make me your disciple, Mike," continued The Foolkiller. "Before two years went by, people were falling at my **feet**, calling me more than human... calling me a **new messiah**. And **I** knew they were right!" Basking in the crowds' adulation, the young preacher still is troubled by the current state of the world,"coming **apart** all around me! And it was all the work of fools! Criminals... protesters... dope pushers... **mocking** the Lord and the military!" The youth links his two great devotions into one and, donning a costume, decides to become "an active agent against the fools!" With that, he makes his way to Reverend Mike's room, to show his mentor his new identity.

Reverend Mike is sitting on his sofa with a bottle of booze in one hand and a luscious blonde in the other.

The Foolkiller kills him.

"But you were the man who **gave** the world its **redeemer**, Mike!" cries The Foolkiller, kneeling with hands clasped before the corpse-shrine. "So I made **you** my **shrine**! My symbol of the route to **Heaven**!"

©1981 Marvel Comics Group

The Foolkiller from *MAN-THING #4*, which examined "many points hardly ever touched on by mainstream comics."

Soon, The Foolkiller rams his truck through the front of a restaurant, picks up Richard Rory, grabs F.A. Schist on the way back, and is about to execute both of them before The Man-Thing [whom he had blasted beforehand] intervenes. As The Foolkiller shrieks, "I am the son, I tell you! I must kill for the sake of heaven!", his blast goes wild and strikes the glass tube enclosing Reverend Mike. A shard of glass pierces The Foolkillers chest, and with a familiar, "Mike! What have I **done** to—," he dies, with the Reverend's body falling over him. "...and the holy war is **ended**," concludes a caption.

This brief and bitter two-parter is successful in its examination of many points hardly ever touched on by mainstream comics: faith healing, the link between conservative religion and militarism, a religionist who can evidently command "healing powers" having feet of clay, and, of course, the old stand-bys, fanaticism and murder. The Foolkiller returned when a psychiatrist took his guise in **OMEGA THE UNKNOWN**, but his quest was not linked to religion.

WARLOCK was, in its opening issues, a second attempt at a Marvel Messiah. To put it bluntly, it never matched the Silver Surfer or even approached it, and its whole ten-issue run was pretty dismal. The symbolism was too obvious, the characters too wooden, the concepts lacking in empathy; it was everything its successor, Starlin's Warlock, was not. It had the veneer of religion but none of the depth.

Christ-figure Him [created in **FANTASTIC FOUR** in 1967 by a team of evil scientists] comes under the auspices of the High Evolutionary, a Yahweh-figure who names his protege Adam Warlock. The High Ev creates a new Earth, Counter-Earth, on the "far side of the sun," and, while he rests, an evolved wolf called the Man-Beast plays Satan-figure and introduces to this virgin world the concept of Evil. The second Eden turns out as bad as the first, and the Evolutionary predictably is about to destroy it, when Warlock offers to set things straight if he will stay his hand. Take if from there through the gaining of four kids who become Apostles of sorts, a confrontation with a villain named Apollo, and a President named Rex Carpenter [heavy symbolism there, gang] who is the host-body of the Man-Beast and has Warlock crucified. Luckily, Warlock rises from the dead three days later and [with the aid of the Hulk] dispatches the Man-Beast before ascending into space. The series had all the insight of a piece of carbon paper.

But **TOMB OF DRACULA** more than made up for it.

Probably no other series, before or since, has dealt so well with the problem of theological evil. Or, if God exists, how can he allow evil to befall good people, even True Believers? William Blake asked the tiger, "Did He Who made the lamb make thee?" Somehow, that question seems to be at the heart of Wolfman's theology. And yet, God is **not** denied existence in Dracula's world... in fact, there are few

...AND FOR THE HULK, IT'S ONE OF THE MOST FULFILLING PERIODS OF HIS HAUNTED LIFE... A TIME OF LEARNING, IN HIS OWN DIM WAY; A TIME OF BELONGING...
...A TIME OF HAPPINESS THAT CLIMAXES AN EVENING ONE WEEK LATER, DURING A DINNER LIKE MANY OTHERS...
...A FEAST THAT'S TO END IN TRAGEDY...!
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The original *"Warlock"* series had "all the insight of a piece of carbon paper."

series in comics that handle the Deity with more care and ambiguity!

Actually, the vampire himself poses a knotty theosophical problem. By definition, a vampire is a tool of Satan and therefore damned by **what he is**. But no one is, in the Christian belief, a consequence of **voluntary** actions ["If you do that you'll go to hell!"], the vampire concept... a damnation that comes whether the damned had done right or wrong, been Christian, atheist, pagan, or what-have-you... tears itself to pieces on the spot. But the existence of vampires, like the fact of interstellar space travel for an sf story, must be a given for the sake of a good tale.

Marv Wolfman began scripting with the seventh issue. By the ninth, in however mild a way, he began introducing an element of religion: Dracula, after nearly drowning in a semi-conscious state, was rescued by English villagers and taken to a nearby church. After he recovers, escapes and begins wreaking mayhem in the town, a priest organizes the townspeople into a lynch mob. To wit, Wolfman wrote a telling caption:

"Ten years before, Father Williams' church was brought to life each Sunday with the prayers and songs of God-fearing men — but the world has changed since then, and slowly, ever so slowly, the rows of benches became half-filled, and the prayers themselves muttered almost half-convincingly...

Perhaps, Father Williams prays, this new act of hell borne demonism will bring his people **back** to him ... and to the **god** he has given his life in worship..."

Wolfman's portrait of contemporary orthodoxy rings true, unfortunately enough. It's also interesting to note that he presents Father Williams' motives as primarily self-centered ["bring his people back to **him**"] and only secondarily religious ["**and** to the God"]. Whatever, though Father Williams' posse manages to kill two local vampires, Dracula himself escapes. And, only five issues later, religion entered the book again... **this** time far less flatteringly.

The scenario: Dracula has finally been killed by Blade, the vampire slayer. But his body is recovered by hypnotized villagers. After he is some distance from the vampire hunters, Dracula's flesh decomposes and his slaves drop him like a hot potato, freed from their spell. Enter Father Josiah Dawn, a caricature of Elmer Gantry, a tent revivalist sitting dejectedly in a deserted tabernacle. Dawn, not at all an intelligent man, is disgusted by his inability to draw the faithful to the Lord's word and throws down the Bible in a fit of pique. It lands propped open. Immediately, Dawn is repentant:

"**No!**—No, Lord—I **didn't** mean that—by all Your glory, I **swear**. It was **Satan,** Lord—Satan's hand on mine which **threw** Your words upon the soiled earth ...Oh Lord—**forgive** him who is the **courier** of Your thoughts—Your wisdoms—**never again** shall I let that demon devil take his hold on me. But Lord—Lord—I am **troubled**—in ways only **You** can heal... For with every passing day there are **fewer** and fewer men who wish to **hear** your words."

Dawn asks God for a miracle. In a way he gets one. But perhaps the message was rerouted, for he stalks out into the daylight and sees the glowing coffin of Drcula, in skeletal form, wooden knife through the chest. Thanking God, Dawn has posters printed up advertising a resurrection. The tent is packed with the curious, as Dawn and Dracula's bones share the stage.

Blade and his ally Frank Drake try to reach the revivalist, but prove too late. As "a sign that it's the Lord who gives life, and the Lord who can take it away," Dawn pulls the knife from Dracula's body. The vampire reforms and attempts to attack Dawn, but the preacher has come equipped with a cross. Angrily, Dracula calls upon his own awesome power and creates a thunderstorm. While Dawn approaches with the cross, Dracula sneers:

"You think yourself a **savior**, do you not, Josiah Dawn—? But **you're not**—YOU'RE NOT! It isn't your God whom you follow, whose word you **heed—no!** It's your own **twisted hate**—your own **mindless venom!**" And with that, a bolt of lightning streaks down—"**striking the very crucifix Josiah Dawn wields!**"

Dracula proclaims to the dying man that "the strength of any... rests **only in themselves!**" But Dawn, with his last breath, proclaims, "I die... but my **soul**... is at peace with the **Lord**... while **yours** can **never** know peace... but **only**... the all-consuming

ITS ORIGINS MAY HAVE BEEN TAINTED, DAVID, BUT MY SOUL IS CLEAN. THUS, MY SON, THERE IS ONLY ONE COURSE I MUST TAKE!
REMEMBER THE WORDS OF SOLOMON, WHEN HE SAID, "LISTEN, MY SON, TAKE MY WORDS TO HEART, AND THE YEARS OF YOUR LIFE SHALL BE MULTIPLIED.
"I HAVE EDUCATED YOU IN THE WAYS OF WISDOM, I HAVE GUIDED YOU ALONG THE PATHS OF HONESTY.
"AS YOU WALK, YOUR GOING WILL BE UNHINDERED, AS YOU RUN, YOU WILL NOT STUMBLE.

A scene from *TOMB OF DRACULA #28*, in which Dracula is pitted against Orthodox Judaism.

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hate." As the vampire takes wing and flies off, captions imply that he envies Dawn the peace he has achieved. Still, this last effort almost comes off as eyewash. Despite the best efforts of religion, Dracula has persevered, returned from death, triumphed. Dawn had faith, but an inadequate faith, not grounded in truth, but in ego. Even his symbols proved of no use to him, in the end.

Wolfman appears to be questioning, for good or ill, the efficacy of religious faith in the real world. One might compare his scenario to that of the British in World War II who depended only on prayer, not on evasive action **coupled** with prayer, to save them from German buzz bombs—and ended up entombed in rubble [a favorite example of Bertrand Russell] or to the six million Jews whose various shades of faith were unable to protect them from the gas chambers and ovens of Nazi concentration camps. Still, on another level, Wolfman **is** showing symbolic evil winning out over religion, and it would not be for many, many issues yet that he would show the power of the Other Side.

In **TOMB OF DRACULA #26-29**, one of the most dramatic Marvel stories of all is set forth when Dracula is pitted against—for the first time—Orthodox Judaism. This tale, dressed in Old Testament quotes [particularly from Proverbs] at every conceivable point, delivered a shock-punch climax that EC would be hard-put to equal, all dealing, in a multilevel fashion, with God, man, and evil in the universe. Opeing with a quote from Proverbs 17:8, the story begins with Joshua Eshcol, an aged Jewish pawnshop owner, fitting together three sections of an ancient Chimera statuette from the time of King Kull. Both he and his son are garbed in prayer shawls and yarmulkas. David questions whether a thing of evil such as the Chimera can be turned to good uses. The old man responds with a long string of quotes from Solomon, which is ended when a gang of thieves break in, take two sections of the Chimera, and kill him.

David Eshcol, however, has recovered the Chimera's tail. As he walks through the city's streets, a caption informs us that:

"For the past twenty-five years David Eshcol's life has been one long thread woven into a tapestry that dates back thousands of years... to Abraham... to Solomon... to Moses. And for all these years David Eshcol has never once strayed from the path outlined by his forefathers."

He soon meets with Sheila Whittier, a girl whom Dracula has become almost enamored with, and the two innocents are drawn into the power play between Dracula and the minions of the evil Dr. Sun for control of the mystic artifact.

While conversing with Sheila, David reveals his first questionings: "I've been taught to have faith... but miracles in 1974 are stretching things for me. I believe in God and His wonders... but should I believe in a statue? How can a piece of carved stone have the powers of God? Is it real, or is it just some golden calf?"

At that, Dracula confronts the twosome. After Dracula informs the youth that "You can deal with **philosophies**, Mr. Eshcol—I deal with **realities**," he induces David to give him the Chimera's tail-piece and creates a mystic firestorm. When he reveals his true nature, David flees from him. Dracula attempts to drain his blood, but Eshcol produces a Star of David chain and wards off the vampire. "Symbols of all **gods** repulse me, Eshcol—your ridiculous version—and all the **others**." Then, in a dialogue emphasizing his symbolic Satanism, Dracula changes his tack:

DRACULA: Abandon that religious token, Eshcol. Don't you realize your God is a **fool**. He's a **lunatic**—Who claims He **created** this world—of **sin**... of **evil** ... of a thousand varied **debaucheries**. What sort of God can such a creature of madness **be**?

DAVID ESHCOL: He created us, Dracula—but He doesn't control our every thought. He **taught** us... **showed** us the path of good and of **evil**, and hopes

His teaching would lead us correctly. Men have travelled **both** paths—but it has been the **man** who was evil—not the God Who created him—Who gave him his **free will** to make his **own** mistakes.

DRACULA: Little boy—man does not have his **choice** in things. He follows the will of his betters... and he is **destroyed** if he does not. Be it his country or his fellow man, he follows his dictated rules—Now **I** must be the one who **forms** those rules... who enforces those instructions. For, am I not your **humans' superior**?

"...How many times have **you faltered** in a decision? How many **errors** have you made in **your life**, Eshcol? I can bring **order**! **Your** life is **confusion**. Which do you want? **Which**?

The Jewish youth is hesitant for a moment. At that, Dracula springs, and gets a Star of David in the face for his troubles. But both are immediately captured, along with Sheila Whittier, by Dr. Sun's agents. The final act is about to begin, with some mind games courtesy of the Chimera.

David is subjected to an illusion that his dead father, once again alive, tells him point blank that the faith he taught David was a "pack of lies." "There is no God, you young fool! There is no Supreme Being! I lied! **Lied!**" With that, he rips the Star of David from David Eshcol's neck and plunges it into hellfire.

Another illusion follows. This time, David is clothed in a goatskin tunic. Behind him is a burning bush which proclaims, "David Eshcol! I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob! I have surely seen the affliction of thy mind, and I have summoned thee here to hear the words of God!

"I am not your God, David Eshcol! There is no God! There is nothing! **nothing!** I am Satan, David Eshcol —Satan caressing you in the flaming hands of Hell itself!" The bush erupts in a paroxysm of laughter. The illusion is finished, and David returns to normalcy, but its work has been done.

Dr. Sun's agents are soon destroyed by Dracula, but Sheila Whittier, having seen Dracula for what he truly is, snatches the Chimera and dashes it to pieces. Then, in defiance of the vampire lord, she turns her back and walks off with David, as Dracula looks on almost helplessly. But this only serves to fuel Dracula's rage at her defiance.

David Eshcol goes to Dracula's coffin, armed with a stake, to end the vampire's unlife. But, as he hesitates, the sun sets outside and Dracula revives, pursuing him through a mansion.

> David pulls himself to safety and then runs as if **Hell** itself was chasing him...
>
> And it is... **Hell is chasing him to claim his soul!**
>
> For, was not David taught that "Like the roaring of a lion the fury of a king; whoever provokes his anger wrongs his own life?"
>
> If that is true with **God**, can it be any **less** true with the **Devil?**
>
> The youth runs, though his father had taught him **not** to run from evil, but to face it —to **ignore** it.
>
> "The eyes of God are everywhere, observing the evil and the good." David was taught this.
>
> "God does not leave the virtuous man hungry, but he thwarts the greed of the wicked," David was taught.
>
> And though it may be true that God **does** honor the virtuous... perhaps He **does** destroy the wicked...
>
> ...Tonight He does **not**.
>
> And at last, David screams.

But Dracula does not win entirely. As he returns to Sheila Whittier, bearing the corpse of David Eshcol, she performs one last act of defiance. She throws herself out of the window, and even Dracula, screaming in concerned protest, cannot save her. A crowd gathers about the body. Somebody asks if she jumped or was pushed. Somebody else answers, "Only the Lor' knows that answer, guv'nor—only the Lor'."

Despite all this, the good guys finally made an appearance in **TOMB OF DRACULA**. We'll have that one next time, along with Dr. Strange's meeting with God, the return of The Spectre, the revamped and intellectualized Warlock, and, believe it or not, the religion-oriented escapades of Howard the Duck. Be here—Shalom!

I HAVE SURELY SEEN THE AFFLICTION OF THY MIND, AND I HAVE SUMMONED THEE HERE TO HEAR THE WORDS OF GOD!
I AM SATAN, DAVID ESHCOL--SATAN CARESSING YOU IN THE FLAMING HANDS OF HELL ITSELF!
NO! THIS CAN'T BE-- IT MUSN'T BE!
I AM NOT YOUR GOD, DAVID ESHCOL! THERE IS NO GOD! THERE IS NOTHING! NOTHING!
HA! HA! HA! HA!
NOOOOOO!!!
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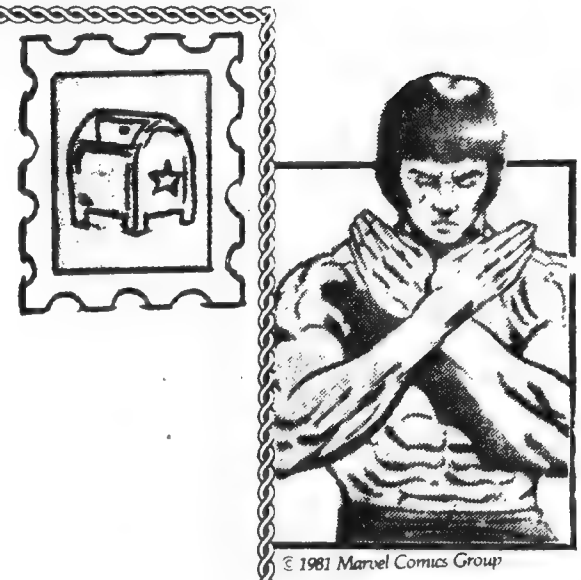
David Eschol's torment through Chimera-illusion from *TOMB OF DRACULA #28*, by Marv Wolfman and Gene Colan.

James Van Hise is best known in fandom as the editor of *RBCC, ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS,* and *FANTASTIC EXPLOITS.*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Alternative Thoughts: THE RISKS OF COMICS WRITING

by James Van Hise

Comic book writing is a very demanding profession and I think it's about time that the writers themselves admitted this. Most fans are cognizant only of artists and comic art pay scales, but writers have to [in some cases] write twice as much material to equal what an artist is making. Writers who turn out great volumes of work, like Roy Thomas [who is contracted to write a hundred pages a month] cannot be expected to have every piece be a gem. Much of the work will be competent, but uninspired. This is **not** to say that the less-than-great stuff will be incompetent, but try and criticize one page of what a writer has done and you're treated as if that's exactly what you're saying. Is it really a crime for a writer to admit that in order to pay the bills he has to write even when he doesn't have any particularly good ideas? Some seem to think so.

A case in point is Doug Moench. He has done marvelous things with what could easily be a mediocre title: **MASTER OF KUNG FU**. He has done issues with no fighting and told stories which were both introspective and lyrical without being self-conscious in their execution. For instance, this quote from page 15 in **MoKF #97**:

> "But I see only a fragile, dying dove cradled in Leiko's trembling hands... and then I am lost again in thought. I have touched Reston's hand and tasted Leiko's tears. I have smelled the past as the scented smoke of drifting, curling memories, and I have seen the truth of my own lies, whispered bitterly through rage and loss of control. I have heard the echoes of old friends calling on the midnight wind, and I have voiced my sorrow and regret for blaming them when it was ever me, listening to bitter whispers. Now I must gather the skeins of all these perceptions together, and weave from their chaos a pattern of order. I must try to understand them... and, thus, understand myself."

It is the writing that makes **MASTER OF KUNG FU** interesting because after reading comics for twenty years such as I have, fight scenes are boring. It is only when they have a meaningful dramatic subtext that they are interesting because after having o.d.'d on the demolition derbies in Marvel comics in the Sixties, anything else is just a reworking and an imitation. Even in **THE X-MEN**, a comic whose writing I otherwise like, I generally skim the fight scenes because they're usually rather dull, the only exceptions being the last three issues which Byrne drew because everything was so intensely **personalized**. This is what Moench does in **THE HANDS OF SHANG-CHI**, because the fights are incidental compared to the way the characters are responding **to** the conflicts and how the conflicts affect them. Despite his protestations, Shang-Chi nonetheless has a knock-down, drag-out fight every issue, but he exits those battles **wounded** in body **and** soul. As the book approached issue **#100**, he was clearly becoming repelled by what events were shaping him into, and he had to come to terms with that because life was life and he had to deal with that. Does anybody want to compare that with the Kung Fu comics done by anybody else? Remember DC's **KARATE KID**?

So Doug Moench has proven himself to be a writer of talent under difficult circumstances, and if fandom doesn't appreciate his Shang-Chi, they at least applaud him for his **MOON KNIGHT**. But it's not the kudos that a writer has to face and deal with, it's the brickbats, and Doug Moench has endured his share, but silently, and without explanation. That's the problem. Taking credit for the cream means you also have

"A SMALL DOVE -- IT GASPS, WRITHES, FLUTTERING AND TREMBLING...
IT... IT'S... DYING...
"YES -- IT SLUMPS STILL, AND NOW ONLY HER HANDS FLUTTER. HER FACE IS SHATTERED BY THE LOSS.
NO.
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MASTER OF KUNG FU: "...issues with no fighting which were both introspective and lyrical."

to take credit for what goes sour. Moench is not exclusive in being unwilling to do that, it's just that his most recent failures have been more notable than anyone else's because of how they were hyped before hand. I'm speaking, of course, of **WARRIORS OF THE SHADOW REALM.** I don't think a major comics company has hyped any book this much since DC's **SUPERMAN VS. ALI**—they even took out ads in the major fanzines. When it flopped with a resounding thud, Moench made himself invisible, because the story is where it fell down. The characters are wooden and clichéd, and the story was yet another dreary Tolkien imitation. Now, Moench may deny ever having read **THE LORD OF THE RINGS**, but this series has been written about so much that one could easily absorb the plot just by osmosis. The previous **"Weirdworld"** stories had a charm about them which was fantasy of a distinctly different brand than Tolkien. That the three part story would degenerate into just another quest for this-or-that was excruciating to behold and literally every facet of the writing has been roundly criticized: R.C. Harvey disassembled it into its frigid parts in **RBCC #151**; Harlan Ellison called it "mindless garbage" in the same issue of **RBCC**; Wendy Pini said she wept over it because of what it could have been; even Steve Gerber, in a move very uncharacteristic of comics writers, criticized Doug in **THE COMICS JOURNAL** and expressed outright amazement that Doug Moench ever allowed the story to see print at all.

What is Doug Moench's response to this tide of criticism? Icy silence. Not one intemperate letter to a a fanzine. Not one word in print anywhere. Mark Burbey, who interviewed Doug in **RBCC #147**, has written to Doug repeatedly to do a follow-up interview, but has received no response.

But why should we expect to receive a response? Perhaps if **WARRIORS OF THE SHADOW REALM** had simply been another 40¢ comic, the pressure for an accounting wouldn't be so intense. The reason it is so intense is because those three lavishly-produced issues with their process cover and fold-out art pages contained more back-patting for a job not yet finished than anything in the history of the genre. Is that an overstatement, Doug? If so, tell me why, and while you're at it...

There's another reason we'd like to hear from Doug. On page 55 of **MARVEL COMICS SUPER SPECIAL #11: "Warriors of the Shadow Realm,"** Doug Moench said the following: "Further pursuing this line of honesty, and with no false modesty, I'd like to set another fact-opinion on record. I'm extremely proud of this current **WEIRDWORLD** project. The story is by far the best plot I've ever done for comics, on every level."

That's why the critics would like to discuss this with him. Even people like me, who have an enormous amount of respect for his talents and can quote chapter and verse from those issues we like, feel that Doug should be willing to defend not justhis writing, but what on the surface appears to be a rather wild statement in regard to that writing. When one considers the depths of character introspection in **MoKF**, one cannot help but look a little askance at the closing reference, "...on every level," because it is the fact that the story only has one level—superficial—that has brought it so much criticism.

But like virtually every writer I can think of in comics, Doug does not seem to be open to criticism of his work, nor willing to enter into a dialogue about it. Like Roy Thomas, he seems to openly regard "outside" [as in outside the comics industry] criticism of his work as being foolish and ill-considered. For instance, an issue of **CAPTAIN MARVEL** Doug wrote near the end of the book's run involved The Destroyer finding the statue-like body of Thanos aboard his spaceship. Thanos had been neutralized by the dying Adam Warlock, but The Destroyer had no way of knowing this. So with no evidence, and even though he had roamed the universe and seen who-knows-what-all, The Destroyer made the snap decision that Captain Marvel was responsible for Thanos' state, and that The Destroyer had been robbed of his destiny. I put on the brakes when I read that. Would any of you like to hazard as to how many Marvel characters now exist who have the power to take on Thanos? In the Mighty Marvel Age of Omnipotence, the number is barely finite. Although I usually don't bother with such things, I wrote to Doug requesting an explanation of the logic behind that snap decision of The Destroyer's because it made no sense and made the plot therefore a bit rickety. Although I didn't save the letter [packrat that I am, I should have], the gist of his response was that it was **obvious** and **who else** would The Destroyer suspect? That was my point, but Doug didn't see it... or didn't want to.

"Warriors of the Shadow Realm" According to Moench's before-publication statements, this story was "the best plot [he'd] ever done for comics, on every level."

When a writer flubs, shouldn't he be willing to explain it, or defend it? Are writers supposed to be **above** criticism?

All writers have bad days, even when they think they're having good days. Evidence of this is the recent **MADAME XANADU** dollar comic issued by DC. It has simply splendid Marshall Rogers art and one of the most trite stories ever written in comics, and it's by Steve Englehart. The story makes the mistake that one would only expect from a beginning writer. We don't understand that characters. If we stretch things, perhaps it can be argued that Laura Grant has fallen under the spell of the book she stole, but she's not the real problem. Joseph, the drug addict is. Why is he a drug addict?! Why is the addiction so important to him? Is he lonely? Why is this not explored? Again, the story suffers from the plague that hit **"Warriors of the Shadow Realm."** It's superficial, and that's spelled d-u-l-l. But it has terrific art so who's to notice? We notice. Perhaps not as much as on **"Weirdworld"** because it doesn't crow so loud and make promises, but we notice.

Why can't a writer say, "Hey, I do 50 or 100 pages a month. They can't all be gems."

Writers are people, and people screw up. If, perhaps, said writers disagree with someone's shrill assessment of their work, then they should be professional enough to defend it on the level of the same specifics with which it is criticized. Is that really expecting so much?

Doug Moench **can** write great sword and sorcery. His King Kull story, **"Demon in a Silvered Glass," [BIZARRE ADVENTURES #26]** is a classic treatment of sword-and-sorcery which captures all the vi-

WAIT-- YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, DRAX!
THANOS HAD TO BE DESTROYED --THE VERY FATE OF THE UNIVERSE DEPENDED ON IT! BUT YOU'RE WRONG IN THINKING THAT I--!
SILENCE!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

The Destroyer's snap decision from *CAPTAIN MARVEL #32* "...made the plot a bit rickety."

UH... NO... WELL, I JUST GOT ANTSY!
GO BACK, JOSEPH. I'LL STOP BY TO SEE YOU WITHIN A FEW DAYS.
OKAY... OKAY. I JUST GOTTA RELAX.
YOU--YOU GENTLE ME, LADY. YOU REALLY DO.
©1981 DC Comics Inc.

sual greatness as well as infusing the story with an undercurrent which adds depth to the proceedings. Kull becomes a real person—far more real than any of the wooden shells in **"Weirdworld." BIZARRE ADVENTURES #26** is a **"Kull"** story worthy of Howard, whereas **"Warriors of the Shadow Realm"** was a story not worthy of Doug Moench, and Doug **created** the latter.

But lest I seem to be laying all this at the feet of the younger group of comics writers, I hasten to point out that this is not a new problem. In the process of editing New Media's **THE BEST OF THE RBCC**, I just retyped an article by Paul Gambaccini from **RBCC #36** in which he describes a tour of the DC offices he took in 1964. Paul kept encountering hostility from editors and writers because he was part of this new thing called **Comics Fandom**, and this fandom had the temerity to criticize comics. There were professionals who felt seriously threatened by a then-small group of fans who were nonetheless dedicated critics. Robert Kanigher has especially harsh words for his fannish critics, and George Kashdan described 1964 fandom as being "too organized" and specifically cited the Academy of Comic Book Fans and Collectors as being "bad" and "off base."

Creators today may not be as quick to defend comics by brushing them off and saying that they're just "slanted toward youngsters," but they are just as annoyed by anyone, it seems, who has the bad taste to criticize them.

Have comics really changed that much, or is it just the story credits which have changed?

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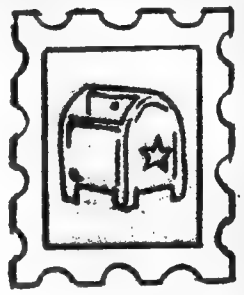
Don and Maggie Thompson have been part of nearly every aspect of comics fandom since its inception. Don works for the *CLEVELAND PRESS*, Maggie edits *FANTASY EMPIRE*, and they both write the *"Beautiful Balloons"* column in *THE BUYER'S GUIDE.*



MORE ABOUT LESS

Nicholas Murray Butler [1862-1947] has only one entry in our **BARTLETT'S FAMILIAR QUOTATIONS**, but it's a good one: "An expert is one who knows more and more about less and less."

We are considered by some people to be experts. Having specialized in an assortment of esoteric topics, we get questioned about many of them and astonish the non-fans who never thought **anyone** could recite, say, the lyrics to the **MAVERICK** theme or any of the several rhymes Mary Jane uttered when she shrank to mouse size. [One of them was "Magic words of 'Poof, poof, piffles,' make me just as small as Sniffles."]

Occasionally, we meet an author or artist who talks with us for a time and finally says, "Who **are** you?" They tend to be a bit taken aback to find people who know SF or movies or TV or comics well enough to trot out quotations and anecdotes and examples in response to almost any topic except sports and rock music.

But there's another side to the picture, if you'll check the first paragraph again. Whereas there are some people who are amazed we know anything about an esoteric field, there are others who are amazed when we **don't** know All Knowledge about Everything.

We never claimed to have this knowledge, mind you. We'd be fools to do so. We don't have the time to memorize the topics of the first fifty issues of **SHOWCASE** or the ability to retain a mental picture of the details of Ant Man's first costume and third name-change. These inabilities have repeatedly humiliated us on the "Stump the Experts" panel at Creation Cons, much to the audience's delight. [There is a negative side to this. At least one fan harassed us for several months because he felt it was our **duty** as "experts" to know all there was to know about **THIMBLE THEATER**, Salten's **BAMBI**, and Collodi's **PINOCCHIO**. He grew increasingly abusive over our failure to devote our time to his favorite pursuits and never did acknowledge our right to spend our time in the manner we felt necessary.]

Sherlock Holmes in **A STUDY IN SCARLET** stated our difficulty. "I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose... Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones." Holmes would certainly have considered the furniture in our brains to be an odd assortment, but he would have acknowledged that to hold on to what strange things we do retain, we have to limit our areas of expertise.

And so do you.

As a result of the limits of the brain [not to mention of time and money and effort], **all** experts grow to know more and more about less and less.

And we suspect that you, who may consider yourself quite an expert on comics art compared with the proverbial Man in the Street, are not the expert you think yourself.

If you are reading this, you're almost certainly a fan of comics art. You may know the members of The X-Men through all the permutations of that team. You can tell Neal Adams' work from Jack Kirby's work. You know that Carl Barks invented Uncle Scrooge and that Chuck Jones' **ONE FROGGY EVENING** is a masterpiece.

You have a lovely mental attic, neatly furnished in Early Spider-Man and Little Lulu. So you know the field of comics art.

But have you ever thought of what comics art encompasses, of what should be furnishing your mental attic to make it worthy of a photo spread in **BETTER HOMES & GARDENS?**

What do you know about educational comics? Children's books? Comic strips of the 1930s? Panel cartoons? Animated cartoons? French and Belgian adventure strips? Japanese comic books? You may know underground comix with an expert's ease, but what have you read of the **commercial** cartoonist who created **MISTER OSWALD**, a strip which has run for decades in a magazine for owners of hardware stores? What do you know about British weekly comics? Have you had a British pen pal sending you **FLOOK** every month for the past thirty years? Have you a collection of Walt Kelly's political cartoons from **THE NEW YORK STAR?**

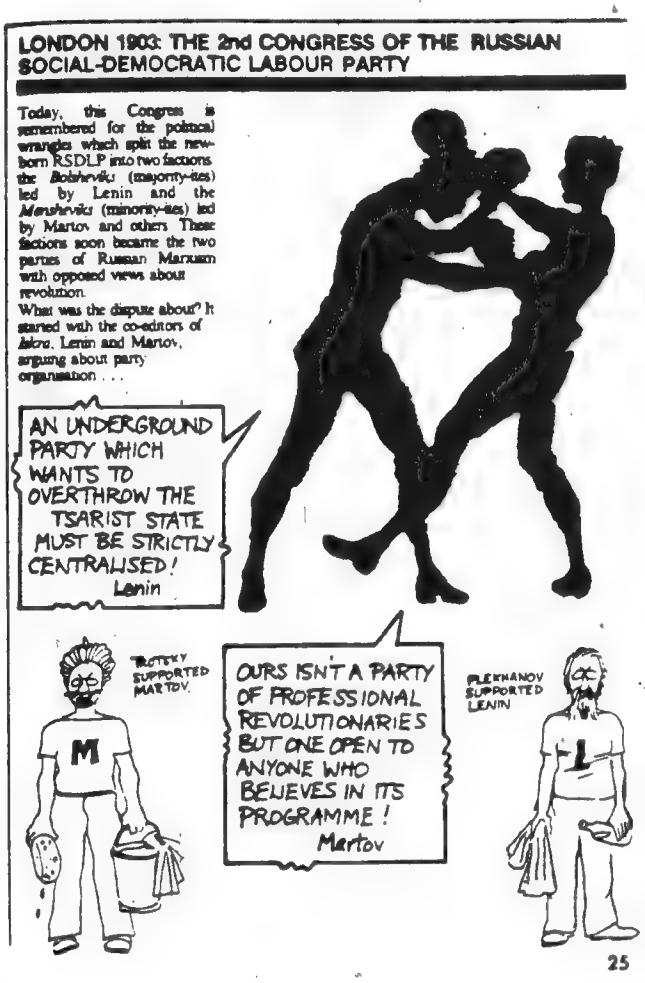
If you're interested in how words and pictures can work together to tell a story, have you ever read the pioneering work of Rudolphe Topffer [1799-1846], who worked out a "how-to" essay on that very subject?

Let us recommend some areas of exploration to you in hopes that you can point to areas that **we** have missed. [Our attics are cluttered but could use attractive new furniture.]

Educational comics are seldom discussed in comics fandom; all too often, the few sad examples of information-in-comics-format are tedious texts with massive diagrams of nuclear reactors or "do this," don't do that" instructions. However, there are some books that provide more than that.

TROTSKY FOR BEGINNERS by Tariq Ali and Phil Evans was originally published in Great Britain; the U.S. edition from Pantheon is $2.95 in paperback. It's one of a series of Pantheon Documentary Comic Books, which include books on Marx, Lenin, Freud, and Einstein, as well as **THE ANTI-NUCLEAR HANDBOOK.** Without taking a political stand on the subject matter of the series, we'll note that the book on Trotsky provides a lively and complex biography that should give you a better idea of the man and his life than you've had to this point. In 173 pages, you are presented with political cartoons, photographs, old engravings, quotations, summaries, and such put together in a potpourri of impressions of what affected Trotsky and what he did and worked for and believed. Truly, it is an educational comic book, an in-depth look at one man and his time.

On the other hand, Larry Gonick's **THE CARTOON HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE** skims the trends of the ancient world, volume by volume. It distills numbers of books on the topic dealt with in each volume; yet it gives a picture that shows the trends clearly, with anecdotes so amusing and memorable that a student would be hard-put to come away in ignorance of the lessons. Like the book on Trotsky, it is not aimed at children [with frank discussions of sex and violence], but it will give the adolescent a good basis for further exploration of the topic. Rip Off Press has so far published five issues of this history, taking the reader through the rise of ancient Greece. At $1.25 a copy, the comics are irreverant and funny and [the clue to a fine educational tool] memorable.


LONDON 1903: THE 2nd CONGRESS OF THE RUSSIAN SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY
Today, this Congress is remembered for the political wrangles which split the newborn RSDLP into two factions the Bolsheviks (majority-ites) led by Lenin and the Menshevics (minority-ites) led by Martov and others. These factions soon became the two parties of Russian Marxism with opposed views about revolution.
What was the dispute about? It started with the co-editors of Iskra, Lenin and Martov, arguing about party organisation . . .
AN UNDERGROUND PARTY WHICH WANTS TO OVERTHROW THE TSARIST STATE MUST BE STRICTLY CENTRALISED! Lenin
TROTSKY SUPPORTED MARTOV.
M
OURS ISN'T A PARTY OF PROFESSIONAL REVOLUTIONARIES BUT ONE OPEN TO ANYONE WHO BELIEVES IN ITS PROGRAMME! Martov
PLEKHANOV SUPPORTED LENIN
L
25

A scene from *TROTSKY FOR BEGINNERS.*

But those are all sort of left-wing and subversive, aren't they? Haven't there been any non-partisan comics? Yes, some of them have been collectors' items for some time. Consider Carl Barks' **DONALD DUCK** or **UNCLE SCROOGE** stories. One discussed how to behave on a camping trip; one conveyed an economics lesson on the development of currency. Consider EC; **MD** and **FRONTLINE COMBAT**, to name just two, covered territory as varied as how to perform a tracheotomy and what happened on Iwo Jima in World War II. Memorable stories told with vim and sprightly pacing mark the top-of-the-line in educational comics, but few comics fans hunt down educational comics for their collections.

Mind you, we learned vast amounts about what makes free enterprise tick when we first encountered **MR. OSWALD.** If there is room in your attic of comics art information for anything besides costumed super-heroes, do yourself a favor. Send Russ Johnson, 421 East 9th Street, Gibson City,

DO? I'M GONNA CALL THE INSURANCE CO.!
HEY, MR. OSWALD! YOUR TRUCK JUST HIT A WOMAN AND KNOCKED HER FOR A ROW OF BRICK SMOKE HOUSES!
WHAT ELSE?

©1981 Russ Johnson

From Russ Johnson's perceptive and unpretentious *40 YEARS WITH MR. OSWALD*, Don and Maggie Thompson "...learned vast amounts about what makes free enterprise tick."

Illinois 60936 a check for $4.95 and ask him to send you an autographed copy of his hardcover collection, **40 YEARS WITH MR. OSWALD.** It is a generous collection of more-panels-than-a-Sunday-strip **MR. OSWALD** strips. To quote Ed Gabriel [who learned of the book through us]: "Every fan of comic art ought to have at least a nodding acquaintance with Mr. Johnson's lovely [and loving] work, if only to realize anew that great cartoonists are magicians, making us care in a peculiarly profound way about a love triangle between a dog, a cat, and a mouse—or making flesh and blood creatures out of four-color ducks—or making us cheer a scrappy hardware retailer in a small American town as he copes with hired help, the Depression, World War II, inflation—in short, a passing parade of mortal events that the eyes of the artist make us see as if for the first time. I think it's safe to assume that hardware retailing is not a subject of intrinsic interest to most of us, yet Mr. Johnson's skill is such that even now, several weeks after reading **40 YEARS WITH MR. OSWALD**, I'd vastly prefer spending time in Mr. Oswald's hardware store than in a star cruiser in search of new worlds."

Have you ever heard of **MR. OSWALD**, you specialists in the field of comics art? Russ Johnson is one of the authentic geniuses in the field, but [as you know more and more about less and less] you've probably passed him by.

But that's not fair. You prefer to read comic books.

Well, then, have you ever looked at a Japanese comic? Have you seen those colossal tomes, half as thick as **OVERSTREET'S PRICE GUIDE**, filled from cover to cover with stories that may as easily be aimed at adults as at kids? We tended to think that Adult Comics Art is a pretty new and daring concept, only recently available in the format of **HEAVY METAL** or a few pages in **PLAYBOY.** But it was more than a decade ago that George Metzger sent us a package containing an assortment of exciting-looking comics in Japanese. Some stories were obviously serials; some comics contained what were, in effect, comics novels. Many had nude women or gorily graphic scenes of violence or grim endings of suicide and despair. Have you ever seen them?

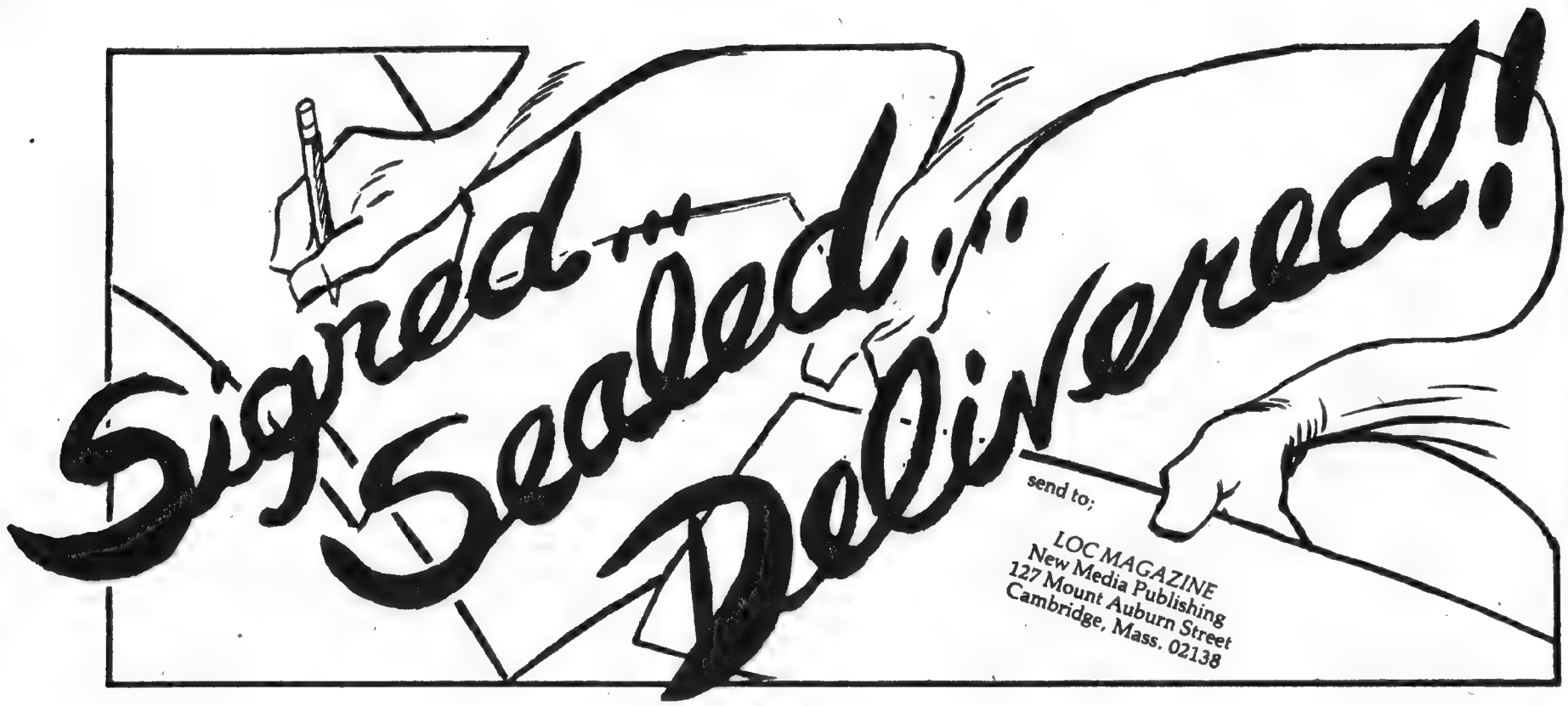
But those are in Japanese and you're not even sure of the panel order. Surely, you could be expected to know more about comics art of the Western World.

What about the French and Belgian strips, among them **ASTERIX, LUCKY LUKE, LIEUTENANT BLUEBERRY,** and **LONE SLOANE**? These have developed fans in the U.S. You may have even begun to buy the translated books, mostly available in British editions. Did you know that Asterix appeared in animated cartoon form as well? [The next time you hear someone from a network complaining that cable companies have gobbled up all the good material and left the networks with nothing, wonder to yourself why the **ASTERIX** features were never dubbed in English and released as holiday specials.] Some dealers are offering the French collections to the American public; take a look. [If you're taking a French course, you might try to convince your teacher that translation of a French comics collection would make a worthier term paper than an article in French about your opinion of **L'ETRANGER.** Spread the word, in other words.]

But how many U.S. dealers offer paperback collections of **THE PERISHERS** from Mirror Books in England? There have been at least twenty-two collections of this delightful gag strip, which began with something of the flavor of a **PEANUTS** imitation and developed into a romp of its own. You've had a chance to see collections of **GARTH** and **MODESTY BLAISE**, but have you seen the lunatic adventures of **FOUR D. JONES**, a cowboy whose magic hoop transported him through space and time in a strip that once sank in the ocean? For a more serious view of cowboys, did you ever see **GUN LAW**, an impressive version of **GUNSMOKE** in strip form which [thanks to licensing laws] may never be reprinted in America?

You do know all there is to know about **American** cartooning, don't you? Have you ever heard of George Carlson?

Tell us, what little-known facet of our tiny world of stories-in-pictures do you know that we still have not explored? From what we know of what we know, we are sure there are at least as many more delights still to be uncovered and brought to the attention of an eager fandom.



Ronny Richardson
Chamblee, Ga.

Sir:

I liked **AVENGERS #200**! It was my hope that someone with writing skills greater than mine would stand up for the issue, but since this has not happened I will do the best I can to defend it.

Ms. Strickland's **"The Rape of Ms. Marvel"** read like a "knee-jerk" reaction to a story she did not like personally, especially in light of your comment in **LOC #2**, page 75, "You should have seen it before we edited out some of the vehemence..." I do not understand why Ms. Strickland thinks this story "degrade[s] women in general by destroying the symbol of womankind." While I'm not too sure what symbol she is talking about, Ms. Marvel is shown as a very brave woman who is able to overcome an unnatural pregnancy, a very unnatural child and being told she was raped to love and protect her son. Indeed, she is presented as a role model worthy to be looked up to by all women.

Ms. Strickland bases her complaint on the fact that Ms. Marvel liked to be raped. "It is obvious that Immortus' machines have renewed their effect upon Ms. Marvel. Remember the angry rape victim at the beginning of the story? Now with a glisten right in her eye and a sob in her heart, she tenderly strokes the rapist's cheek..." But Ms. Marvel did not know she was raped until page 33!

Ms. Marvel gives birth to and rejects her son. "I've been used! That isn't my baby! I don't even know who the father is!" [Page 3, panel 4] Ms. Marvel does not say that because she was raped. Indeed, she has no idea how "that thing" came to be growing inside her: "My father's pre-set mechanisms masked your recent memories..." [Page 33, panel 4] Later, she begins to love her son. "But I can't leave you!" [Page 27, panel 2], and then leaves with him. I talked to two experts in this field and they said that the rejection and later acceptance was a **typical** reaction for mothers giving birth to unwanted infants.

ENERGY BEAM--SOME KIND OF TELEPATHIC ATTACK! MIND...ON FIRE, HEAD FEELS ABOUT TO BURST APART!
GOT TO GET AWAY! BUT...CAN'T FOCUS CONCENTRATION... TO FLY! I'M A SITTING DUCK!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

The trials of Ms. Marvel continue to attract the attention of *LOC* readers.

The only question remaining is why Ms. Marvel would want to have anything to do with someone, even if it is her son, who admitted raping her. There

are two possible answers to this. One, since she cannot remember the rape, just hearing about it can not bear a large emotional impact. And two, a mother's love is very strong. I'm sure there are a great many mothers willing to forgive their sons of any or all crimes. It's not logical, but such is the nature of any type of love.

Another item Ms. Strickland raises is how this one comic portrays the "role of women." While it is logical to talk about the role of women in **comics**, this macro concept cannot be worked with on a micro level, i.e., the role of **a** woman in **a** comic. You would not judge all newspaper strips by the March 8 **DICK TRACY** strip.

Ms. Strickland tries to make major points about minor matters, i.e., "poetry, clothes and music he furnished, thinking that those are the only things women are interested in." [**LOC #1**, page 64] I get the feeling she would get upset about her date [or mate] bringing her flowers or opening the door for her. This type of extremism has no point in a magazine about comic books—it belongs in **MS.** or **PLAYGIRL**.

Is *LOC* becoming just another *MS.* or *PLAYGIRL?* Are we supporting feminist extremism? Reader Ronny Richardson is wary of Carol Strickland's denunciation of *AVENGERS #200* and says it has "no point in a magazine about comic books."

Yes, I liked **AVENGERS #200.**

In **LOC #2**, **"God and Man in Comic Books,"** Mr. Mougin writes about **OUR ARMY AT WAR #207**, in which "a skinny G.I. ... prayed for divine assistance in battle **rather** than picking up a gun." [**LOC #2**, page 13] But in that comic, that skinny G.I. is shown with either a gun or a grenade (or both) on page 1, panel 4; page 6, panel 3; and page 12, panel 3.

Finally, your format is sloppy. **Every** reference to a certain comic book should include the title and issue number, not just some of them. And the illustrations should include the page number as well. You are batting less than .500 in this area and that makes it very hard to follow the logic when you have to spend hours looking for the unreferenced books.

While in general we'd prefer to encourage the other readers to side with or take issue with your conclusions, Ronny, there are a few things that we'd like to mention as regards your defense of AVENGERS #200. The first is that our comment "You should have seen it before we edited out some of the vehemence" was half-serious. The printed article differed from the manuscript only in a few instances of re-phrasing.

Also, we feel that your linking of Carol Strickland's perhaps-overly-reactionary dismissal of stereotypical "feminine" things like "poetry, clothes, and music" is rather off-base itself. If only because of readily-available comparisons, we wouldn't call it "extremism"—and neither would we apply that classification [especially with its obvious derogatory implications] to MS., at least.

As regards your correction of Lou's "God and Man" example, you'll have to fight it out with him. We don't have the issue. Lou?

Also, as regards the references to certain comics, and the referencing of the illustrations as well, the former is something we have been encouraging our writers to include. A few more rounds with the brass knuckles should convince them all. No, seriously, we agree with you there, and the biggest problem we've had in that regard is that most of our writers have such huge collections from which they can more easily supply the references needed from their own memories than from the comics themselves. We'd really hate to tell Rich Morrissey, say, that he had to go back to his multiple-thousand issue DC collection and give us the issue number of the 1950s "Batman" story which he described in his latest article—especially since Rich would undoubtably describe the story in such detail that referencing the original would become merely a matter of spot-checking details. This also holds true for Chuck Huber, who has a similarly-prodigious memory but is separated from the bulk of his comics collection. The list could continue...

And about the illustrations: we never even thought that there was much of a need to footnote them. It seemed that the whole point of including an illustration was so that it could complement the text's thrust to the point at which looking up the referred-to comic became unnecessary. Is anyone else out there living a less-full life because we're making them spend their weekends and vacations looking up unreferenced illustrations? Let us know.

John Byrne's first *FF:* "The man means business."

John J Lewandowski
Jersey City, NJ

The second issue of **LOC** was an improvement over the first but that was to be expected. The articles this time around seemed as if more thought and research were put into them. Furthermore, your writers stayed closer to their topics than last issue.

I particularly like James Van Hise's review on **THE FANTASTIC FOUR** and what John Byrne has in store for them. Anybody that has seen him recently and has read **FF #232** knows the man means business. Byrne has stated he wishes to bring us [the readers] back to the feeling the early issues had and I wouldn't mind seeing that done. I can say without shame that I was too young to read the first 40 or so issues when they first came out, but that's not to say I haven't read those issues since. Byrne hopes to bring back the days when The Thing and The Torch are continually arguing. He also has stated that with Stan Lee's approval he'd like to dissolve the relationship between Ben and Alicia. Although I can't see the breaking up of the two people who mean so much to each other, Byrne's reason for the break-up is completely understandable. And that reason is: Alicia just makes him more vulnerable and an easy mark to assure The Thing's cooperation from anyone who holds her in their custody. Aside from that reason the plot-lines in the past have used that formula way too much. Take a look at just about any issue of **MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE.**

Your conversation with Bill Danch was both interesting and informative, but was way too short.

While I'm thinking about it, who did the cover?

In the future, how about a reader's poll and the results and more room for letters? As I stated in my first letter, this book—more than any other fanzine—should have a say for the average reader and the only way to accomplish this is to have more room for letters. Reader's letters should be a prime concern for this book [or any other book for that matter]. Just remember what **LOC** stands for and you're on the right track.

Glad you thought that LOC #2 was an improvement over #1, John. We did, too. We suspect, however, that it was more a case of each writer having a more sound idea of the tone of the magazine this time than "more thought and research."

As regards Byrne's FFs, by the time this letter column comes out, you'll have had four or five more chances to see whether or not you like 'em. Byrne's statement that he wants to bring the series back to 1963 quality obviously means many things to many people, and we're all still in the process of figuring out just what 1963 FANTASTIC FOURs meant to John Byrne. One correction, though: According to our reports (see the convention report in COMICS FEATURE #10, for instance), Byrne is breaking up Ben and Alicia because The Thing's having a girlfriend robs his character of its lone, tragic image. The kidnapping reason is probably valid, too, of course, but let's hope that the powers-that-be don't decide to write out every female partner/girlfriend/etc. who has been kidnapped too many times.

The cover was done by Richard Howell, one of the editors of CF and LOC, and the creator/artist/writer of the cult PORTIA PRINZ OF THE GLAMAZONS series.

You didn't tell us on which subject we should poll the readers, John. Do you mean a "which article in our last issue did you like best" sort of poll or what? We must admit that strictly in terms of manpower, we'd be somewhat reluctant to undertake a poll. They're time-consuming, and, unless there's a certain minimum number of responses, they just don't tell one anything. Any other ideas on the subject?

And you say you want more room for letters? Well, we have plenty of room for letters! You would-be letter writers have only yourselves to blame! In other words, we can print as many—or as few—pages of letters as we decide will make an interesting package. If we don't get many (or any) interesting letters, we might just skip the section entirely one issue. That is a warning!

Howard Leroy Davis
Pitman, New Jersey

A loc for **LOC #1**...

First, a scorecard:

Titans [Busiek]: inaccurate scholarship, not too interesting

Overwriting [Howell]: interesting

Wonder Woman [Ward]: not too interesting

Alt. Thoughts [Van Hise]: interesting

Women Don't [Kalish]: unread

Fu Manchu [Phillips]: not too interesting, but well done

Success [Morrissey]: well done, interesting.

Loc Ness [Sanderson]: well done, very interesting

Money/Love [Thompsons]: well done, interesting

Burn [Gillis]: well done, very interesting

Rape [Strickland]: inaccurate scholarship, not too interesting

Writing/Art [Soron]: see below

Captains [Busiek]: poorly done, not too interesting

[Maybe if my gender changed, I'd feel differently about Kalish's and Strickland's.]

LOC #1's package is not visually impressive. You could use some work in that area. The contrast of bold-to-regular type is especially harsh.

Only Soron's article rattled my cage. In trying to prove the equal importance of art and writing, he ends up loading the writer's side of the scale—which he notes was his original position before he became open-minded.

He sees the text's appeal as conscious. Perhaps, but word choices are more than embellishment. Would Strickland's article's title have had the same force if it had been **"The Intercourse of Ms. Marvel"** instead of **"The Rape of Ms. Marvel"**?

To burden the artist with a statement saying that he must use "cliches" is to do him a great disservice. He must use comics story-telling "conventions" to make his work quickly understood. The words do not mean the same thing.

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SMALLVILLE SENTINEL
SUPERBOY IMPERILS TOWN WITH DEADLY CLOUD!
HAVE TO LEAVE EARTH INSTEAD OF A HERO, I'VE TURNED OUT TO BE THE WORLD'S GREATEST MENACE!
Gotham Gazette
BOY OF STEEL CAUSES PACIFIC TIDAL WAVE!
DAILY PLANET
SPACE ALIEN PURSUES SUPERBOY TO EARTH, ENDANGERS WORLD!
EXTRA!
SUPERBOY
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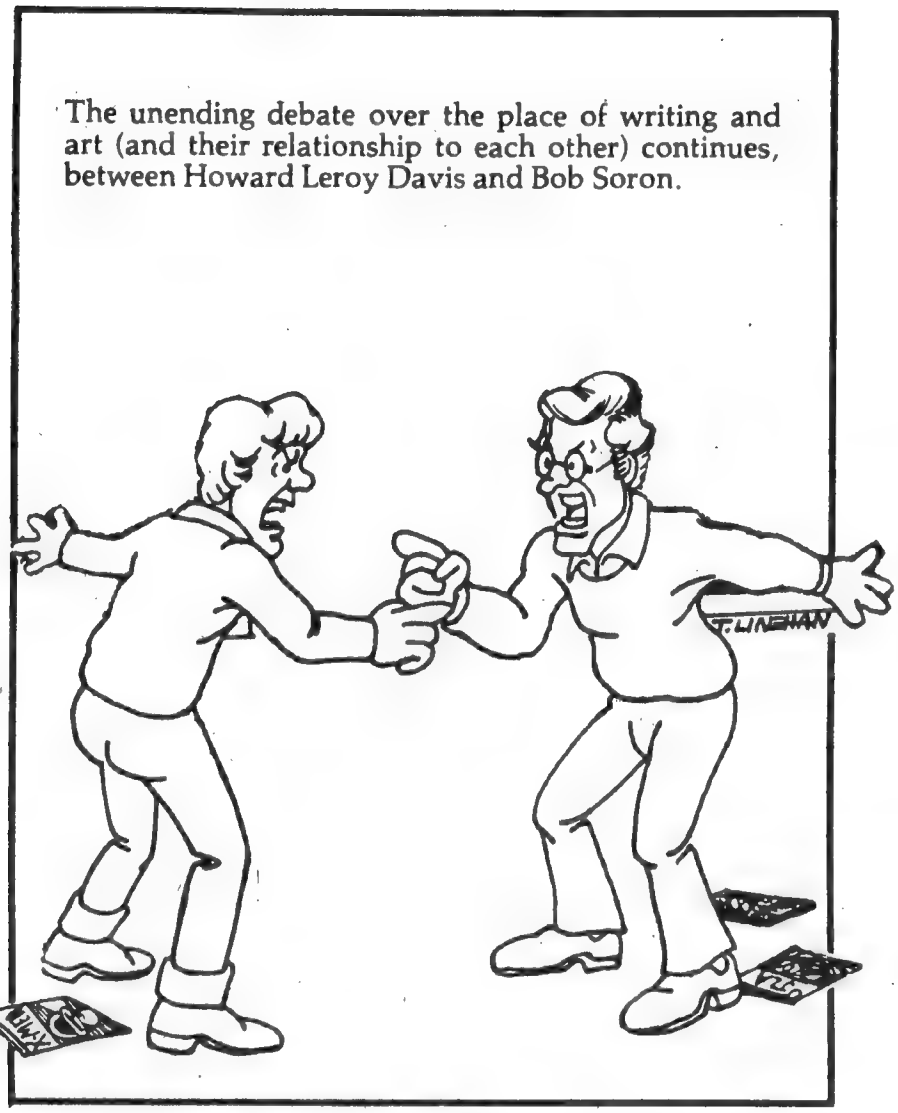
Kurt Schaffenberger: An example of expert use of comics visual conventions, or a purveyor of clichés. Have we defined either?

Further, to say that art communicates viscerally rather than consciously is to ignore the thousands of times when object placement, figure position, or facial expression told you something that was not expressed in the text. I don't mean that viscerally-made communications are unimportant: Gene Colan used rain and Frank Thorne used a campfire and leaves in deeply meaningful ways that did not communicate consciously on first reading, to cite only two examples. But the art consciously tells the story as well.

I thought to say more, but I realized that Bob Soron's art knowledge is too shallow to attempt to broaden in a single letter. I urge him to read and carefully study what R.C. Harvey has to say on comics art.

I have been reading R.C. Harvey's columns in THE COMICS JOURNAL; I agree with him on some things and disagree with him on some things. But our interests aren't quite the same. (At least, I don't think they are—I hate to put words in someone else's mouth.) Anyway, my primary interest is not how the art affects the story, but how the story affecfects the art.


The unending debate over the place of writing and art (and their relationship to each other) continues, between Howard Leroy Davis and Bob Soron.
T.LINEHAN

Taking your other points in order...

I didn't quite claim to be open-minded. The "I confess..." paragraph stated my biases, "even now..."; also, the next paragraph was, in its entirety, a qualification which stated that this was all coming from personal experience. I don't at all deny that I could have been way off base (I use "could" as a conditional, not as past tense). I have seen very few studies on how people read comics.

The last paragraph on page 67 and the left half of page 69 say essentially the same thing you do about "conventions" and "cliches." Quoting: "...they don't become cliches: the familiarity helps us rather than hinders us. ... These techniques of the artists, then—these pseudo-cliches—are simply conventions of the medium. It's only when we get an artist who uses the same conventions over and over—Mike Grell and Kurt Schaffenberger come immediately to mind—that we start to consider them to be cliches." And the paragraph after that restates it yet again.

I'm not so sure we're talking about the same thing in the next paragraph. The art is giving the reader impressions. There are direct, obvious impressions, and there are indirect, less obvious impressions. Regardless of whether the artist intentionally uses the printed-page equivalent of body English, the reader will treat it as real-life body English: it will create an impression, but to someone who has not studied body English, it will communicate only an impression.

There are other ways art communicates and other ways impressions are made, of course, but I don't want to start cataloguing and arguing such specific examples; we'd never finish.

The main idea behind the article was that certain groups in fandom tend to lock onto one style of comics art and hold that up as "how it should be done," when there are valid criteria for all types of comics art. All types have some good examples and some bad examples. I would rather see people working on defining the criteria by which these methods should be judged and less time simply knocking approaches they don't follow or appreciate.

I was also kind of disappointed that you shrugged your shoulders, decided I wouldn't understand what you meant if you went any further, and signed off. I think I could muddle through somehow; another point to consider, however, is that the only response to the article was your letter. That means that every other LOC reader agreed enough to be complacent about it. The whole point of the magazine is to encourage communication about different ideas, and I think that is where this fits in.

(In the meantime, the series moves over to BRUSH STROKES with its next installment, which discusses Sheldon Mayer's work.)

As for the look of the magazine—this typeface (Microstyle) has no italic face, which means that we must use boldface instead. The squareness of the letters occasionally raises a problem—words like "villain" begin to look more like UPC codes—but, at this point, we haven't found it to be much of a problem. As for other changes—well, we're always open to suggestions.

Gary Dunaier
Flushing, NY

Dear Richard and Carol:

I'm going to make a few comments on **LOC #1.** Not so much on the magazine itself (after the next paragraph), but about the **concept** of such a zine.

One thing I don't like about comic books is that the year doesn't appear on the cover. Not the copyright year, which Marvel uses, but the year in relation to

the cover date. It's a peculiarity I have—I know it doesn't affect the comic 1/10 of 1%. But fanzines are somewhat different. Whereas comic books are fictional in content, fanzines do have dated material (news, reviews, interviews, etc.), and should be dated. Most fanzines are—**LOC** isn't. The only year given is 1980, the copyright year. Now, **I** know **LOC #1** is the January, 1981, issue, and **you** know it. But will the fan buying it five years from now know it, or will he believe the date to be January 1**980**?

Here's what I really want to talk about. I think that if **LOC** is going to be a true mirror of fandom's opinions, you should devote as much space as you can to letters from readers—and not just comments on Peter Gillis' column. If I want to write a letter about why the year should appear on comic book covers, it should have just as much right to appear in **LOC** as the letter describing the Aeolian cadences in **THE X-MEN.** If it happens that the long letter columns aren't working out, let us tell you—don't decide for us.

Why do I feel so strongly about the idea of **LOC** having a long letter column? Because the average fan doesn't have a Stan's Soapbox where he can praise or pan. The average fan has only the letter columns to express his opinions—**if** he's lucky enough to see print. All I'm saying is that I think you should give the average fan more of a chance to have his views published, and not restrict your pages to those who already write for 83 million fanzines.

I liked **LOC #1**. The concept is gearfab. There's just one bit in the editorial which confuses me. Here it is: "**LOC** can succeed only if its readers contribute thought-provoking essays of their own or respond to the articles already published." I interpret that sentence as saying we can write letters commenting only on previous issues of **LOC**—we have to write our own essays, not letters, if we want to bring up a previously-unmentioned topic. I believe if everybody has an equal chance to say what they want to say in whatever form they choose, and have an equal chance of having it published, **then LOC** will become a **true** opinion zine.

I think that it was more a matter of semantics in that editorial. I fully agree with you—my conception of the LOC lettercol is kind of like a bunch of fans going to get a beer (or iced tea for the abstainers) and shoot the breeze. That doesn't mean that people can't bring up their own topics, or comment on what hath gone before—we're willing to consider every letter people send us for publication.

At this point, there are two circumstances under which we won't print a letter. Richard described the first situation last issue—we aren't going to print insults. The second condition is that of room. (The letter column is the most flexible part of the magazine in terms of length, and so while we plan to have a substantially-sized column each issue, it will be where extra material is juggled around to make the contents fit the magazine. You'll note that we're still finishing up comments on issue #1.)

So, yes, we fully agree—anyone can feel free to write anything about comics (and that's a mighty wide field).

Of course, one thing to remember is that we pay for articles. Letters are editorial correspondence. But we're not fussy otherwise.

Putting the year on the cover—I tend to prefer less copy on the cover. The top is already a bit cluttered. But perhaps on the contents page? We'll see what we can work out.

Ann Nichols
Sierra Vista AZ

I'll have to take exception to Murray Ward's comment about Morbius the Living Vampire (sorry about that, Mur) in **LOC #2**. I can think of another vampire who succumbed to his dark urges and yet remained a hero to me—Barnabas Collins of **DARK SHADOWS** (and I certainly don't mean the pale shadow of the original portrayed in the Gold Key comic). That man could be as ruthless as any villain, even long after he became the show's recognized hero. (The scene in which he used his powers to force an opponent to shoot himself to death comes readily to mind. I don't quite count the time he forced the servant of an opponent to walk off a cliff because he never seemed to actually intend for the man to die. I gathered the impression that he forgot about him in the heat of his argument with the master and remembered him only when he screamed as he fell. I do not recall him being indifferent to what he had done, nor was he to other "deaths of innocents" that he caused.)

Perhaps the key reason that Barnabas remained a hero in spite of his sometimes unsavory actions was that the man had **not** been conquered by the vampire. He knew and loathed what he was. More than once he expressed the desire to be dead, truly dead, to escape his curse. What seemed to keep him going (more than any silly obsession with finding the reincarnation of his empty-headed lost love) was his genuine concern for his family and friends and the desire to combat the supernatural evil that constantly threatened them.

True, he was very villainous in the beginning, but I don't think he was really sane then, any more than I think Jean Grey was sane when she was the Dark

Phoenix. Surely you must admit that any man who spent over a century paralyzed inside a chained coffin cannot be expected to be totally rational when he is first released. In fact, it is to his credit that he managed to reclaim both his sanity and his humanity.

Barnabas was also different in another way: his deepest and most enduring friendship was with a woman, Dr. Julia Hoffman. His cousin Quentin and servant Willie might also be friends who were in on his secret, but neither were his equals. Willie has some shrewdness and common sense going for him, but was really just a normal man caught in very abnormal events. Quentin was intelligent, but lacked drive. Professor T. Eliot Stokes, a friend of Baranabas' who was not in on the secret, was more the sort of expert who was consulted when necessary than an active companion in the fight against evil. Only Julia was his true comrade-in-arms. While I realize that this is straying from the subject of villainous heroes, the articles on female characters which I read before Murray's naturally helped bring Julia Hoffman to mind once I started thinking of Barnabas. I was initially attracted to the show because of Barnabas, but by the time I had seen the last of the Collinses of this universe [I prefer to think that **DARK SHADOWS** ended with Barnabas' Julia's, and Prof. Stokes' return from

the 1840s storyline] I was definitely watching the show for Julia.

Julia was a rarity for me then—she was a respected professional, a doctor who headed a sanitarium, a strong-willed, intelligent **woman**. I had missed her early relationship with Barnabas as his foe. By the time I first met her she had already been relegated to a less-interesting position as a sort of side-kick who slaved to save the domineering hero she'd fallen in love with. She seemed to truly come into her own again when she and Barnabas were once more on opposite sides. As he had once been trapped by his vampire urges and "find a new Josette" obsession, he was now under the will of mysterious ancient evil creatures called Leviathans. Their break-up occurred almost as soon as he fell under the Leviathans' spell—mainly because of his clumsy attempt to prevent her from discovering what was going on. Either his normally-sharp wits were clouded that night or subconsciously he was sending out a distress signal because his abrupt and secretive behavior—to the one person from whom he hid nothing—could not have been more calculated to arouse suspicion.

Julia rose to the occasion. Although she really didn't know what was going on, she was nonetheless so successful in her efforts that at last the Leviathans themselves ordered Barnabas to kill her. Barnabas, who had been a willing slave up until then, suddenly balked. At first he tried to recruit Julia, but he learned that she was one of those people who were naturally immune to the Leviathans' power. Faced with the choice of killing Julia or becoming a vampire again [this story took place during one of his "I'm cured!" periods], he chose to become a vampire again.

The relationship of Barnabas and Julia was never quite the same again. Barnabas still dominated, but Julia stood up to him more than previously. Julia, in her own way, was as superhuman as Barnabas. What other human being could carry on her practice [combined with the latest fight-against-evil] during the day and stay up much of the night without falling to pieces after awhile? Yet she operated this way for years. She boggled the mind during that 1840s episode by recreating, almost overnight, without help [except for a not-terribly-well-educated singer] her modern laboratory. [At least as best she could with that century's materials.] That she had nobility of heart could not be denied. Though she loved Barnabas enough to share his battles against horrors [from which] no one could blame her if she decided to cut and run, he never treated her as anything other than his best friend. I don't think he ever realized how she [or even he—there were hints in the show that his devotion went beyond friendship] felt. He couldn't have and still blather on about his Josette, or Kitty, or Roxanne, etc. to her. Yet Julia rarely showed jealousy. Indeed, if he needed help for one of his ladies, she gave it. [You're a better woman than I am...] For me, Julia Hoffman was the true hero of **DARK SHADOWS.**

"Why Women Read Archie Comics" by Carol Kalish brought several Archie readers out of the closet.

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[Yes, I did devote a lot of space to a non-comics subject, but I only wish the comics adaptation had presented the original. It would have been interesting.]

I've finally finished **LOC #2** and I've some more disjointed comments.

I'm looking forward to **"God and Man in Comics, Part Two."** I've been thinking about this subject for quite some time, especially since I noticed that it wasn't enough to be merely super-powerful anymore. To be a real contender in the villain or super-alien field, one must claim godhood. Considering the concept of God I grew up with [an infinite being who cannot be truly comprehended by the finite mind], these "gods" are pretty small potatoes indeed. Actually, I am less distressed by the fact that they want to call themselves gods than that the humans are so eager to take them at their own valuation.

I enjoyed **"Can Super-Hero Marriage be Saved?"** but I don't feel I have anything to add to it at the moment.

"Why Women Read Archie Comics" reminds me of how much I liked them years ago. I'd probably still be buying them if the proliferation of super-hero comics and my then-grim determination to read each and every one forced me to drop them for lack of money. [Actually, I wasn't reading every DC hero, but I was with Marvel.] If I weren't spending my cash on Japanese animation stuff now I'd be tempted to go back.

I liked the rest of the articles, particularly **"The Many Virtues of Lois Lane"** and **"That's What Friends Are For—Even in Comics!"** The only really negative reactions I had were to **"I Remember Friday Foster and the Black Heroines of Comics"** [the choice of adjectives caused some mental retching after awhile] and my disagreement with Murray Ward for agreeing with Jim Shooter.

I do agree in principle—I just don't feel it applied in Jean's case. As I said earlier, I don't think Jean was

sane at the time. Other heroes have gone temporarily insane and run amok. It is Jean's and the "asparagus people's" tragedy that she had so much power to destroy with while she was not in control of herself. Then again, perhaps it is just as well for her that she did die. I don't think I could stand to live with myself if I had learned that I'd killed innocent people during a bout of insanity. It was a very BAD idea—even stripped of her powers, etc., how could Jean have gone back to her normal life with the knowledge of what she had done? Chris Claremont **should** be blamed for her demise.

By the way—I recall The Avengers once had a no-killing oath. Whatever became of that?

Food for thought: if Supermans Red and Blue were "a hundred times more brilliant than the original" then Lois and Lana would have been severely retarded compared to them. How could they have married and lived happily ever after?

John Byrne's opinion of the "last Batman story" ignores the possibility that a person can grow beyond his original viewpoint and purpose. Batman need not be limited because he has caught his parents' killer. What a waste that would be.

As for letters to comics when you don't like what's going on—I've written plenty of them in the past. I've also seen letters pages full of praise and nothing else for the very issue I panned. I still write "protest letters" sometimes, but I don't get the feeling anyone's paying attention to them.

Even us, Ann? We're different—really!

No, seriously now. The mention of DARK SHADOWS brings in examples of both the villainous hero and the male/female partnership which our writers had not included in their examples of the classifications under question. The first topic which that raises with us is: Should we be restricting our discussions to comic-book-and-strip examples and discussions? Some other examples have crept in here and there (Margaret O'Connell's mention of THE AVENGERS TV show springs to mind), but in general, we've stayed pretty much within some well-defined boundaries. Is this the way for LOC debates to stay?

Also, your analysis of the DARK SHADOWS dynamics was very good. It is indeed a shame that the comic book version of the show lacked nearly everything which made the TV version so attractive. Perhaps the strong continuity of the daily soap-opera format discouraged the Gold Key people from producing anything but static stories, using only two or three characters from the show in anything approximating major roles. Some of us were never too fond of the comics-world

WHICH SHALL WE TAIL?
NONE YET! I HEAR A SNORING SOUND BENEATH THE THRONE!
RAMMP
AS I THOUGHT-- ONE OF THE SERVANT GODS-- SNORING!
IT'S LAZINESS-- ONE OF THE SEVEN DEADLY ENEMIES OF MAN! THEY MUST BE EVIL'S SERVANTS!
© 1981 DC Comics Inc.
Does Captain Marvel's "wisdom of Solomon" have any relation to his intelligence, or is it just a power to be called upon whenever needed?

Barnabas looking like an anorexic Manhunter from Mars, either.

"Why Women Read Archie Comics"-writer Carol B. Kalish strongly recommends that you at least go back to reading BETTY AND VERONICA, Ann. She claims it's the best of the lot right now (with THAT WILKIN BOY and JOSIE & THE PUSSYCATS cut down to twice a year each). She evinces a prejudice for any Archie story written by Frank Doyle (who goes heavily into humorous character illumination of the type described in the article), and drawn by Dan DeCarlo.

The usual problem when attempting to discuss whether or not the late Jean Grey should have been blamed for her crimes is that the story sequence involving her corruption insists two mutually contradictory plots: 1) that Phoenix was Jean's corrupt inner core-self, freed from conventions, morals, etc., and with her powers developed to their highest levels, and 2) that the Phoenix was an independent, evil entity which possessed poor Jeannie and ultimately eclipsed her inarguably good and noble character. If one wants to argue the former, then she probably did deserve it. (One might also want to argue how a nice girl like that ever got all that corruption inside her, but that's another question entirely.) If one really wants to argue the latter position (which was the one with which the creative team were scrimmaging at the finale of the Phoenix story—after its eleventh-hour introduction the issue before), then she didn't deserve to

Jean Grey in somewhat saner times. Ann Nichols draws parallels between the late Marvel Girl and the repeatedly-late Barnabas Collins.

die, but, as the Phoenix-entity could only go on to possess her again and cause more destruction, it was the only safe choice. It wasn't much of a choice for Jean Grey, but what the hell? The sales went up, didn't they?

Unless they've repealed it off-panel, The Avengers still have their oath. Have they killed anyone lately?

It would not be out of the question to argue that Superman Red/Blue's brilliance was of the merely technical sort, much as Superman's present "super-brain" is of no practical use for normal social interaction, etc. Also as with Captain Marvel's supposedly having the Wisdom of Solomon. Anybody ever seen it make him any smarter?

Jerry Bails

Dear Murray,

I just finished your article on **"Wonder Woman"** in **LOC #1**, and enjoyed it very much. I have always liked the character, especially Marston's version, and keep hoping that she'll get an editor/writer and artist who will have more respect for the original concept, and be consistent.

I have always believed that Hercules was Diana's father—even on Earth-II. You must remember that the Amazons deal with their own history allegorically, as many cultures do. Out of respect for her traditions, an Amazon will always couch her history in mythical terms, even though she knows better.

Here are some things you may want to take note of. One, originally, the Purple Healing Ray was created by Paula [formerly Baroness Von Gunter]. Only much later was it credited to Wonder Woman. **[Murray's note: I knew this, but left it out so as not to unnecessarily confuse newer readers.]** Two, the so-called Magic Sphere, which allowed the Amazons to see the future, was treated as a magical device, but was obviously a scientific instrument, needing a scientist like Paula to keep it working properly—another example of covering scientific developments with a mythical element. There are anthropological reasons for this.

Marston died in 1947 and many stories from about 1944-47 were written by his assistant Joye Murchison [after Marston was struck by polio, if I remember correctly]. Kanigher claims to have been writing **WW** since he came to DC in the mid-1940s. I place the end of the canonical tales at the end of the run of **SENSATION** and **ALL STAR**. At about that time Kanigher began **re**writing stories of the origin of the lasso, WW's bracelets, etc. for WW's book. I consider these and most of what followed as apocryphal. There's no reason why all those inconsistent and impossible stories have to be woven into a single canon.

In my view, the Wonder Woman of Earth-II was not magical, either. Her people, like most all people, accepted a mythology that was deeply ingrained. Losing her power when her bracelets were chained by a man [or even **thought** to be chained by a man] was like a post-hypnotic suggestion that WW could do little but obey.

Oh, you forgot the Fountain of Youth on Paradise Island, another natural source of their power that was mythologized by the Amazons themselves.

Thank you, Jerry for your approbation of and addition to Murray's exhaustive piece. Although it hasn't been proven to our editorial satisfaction that Wonder Woman's father was Hercules [or indeed, that Diana had a father at all], and that the Amazons' version of their own history shouldn't be taken at face value, AND that the contradictions in the presentation of Wonder Woman's powers and origin are anything more than editorial and authorial oversight, we still regard any sort of intellectual speculation of this nature to be fair game for LOC. It's the setting forth of the ideas that counts, not any exhortations for adherence.

Bill Mantlo
New York, NY

Dear Folks,

I'd like to congratulate you on your first issue of **LOC**. It is refreshing to come across a fan publication honestly engaged in criticism as opposed to muckraking.

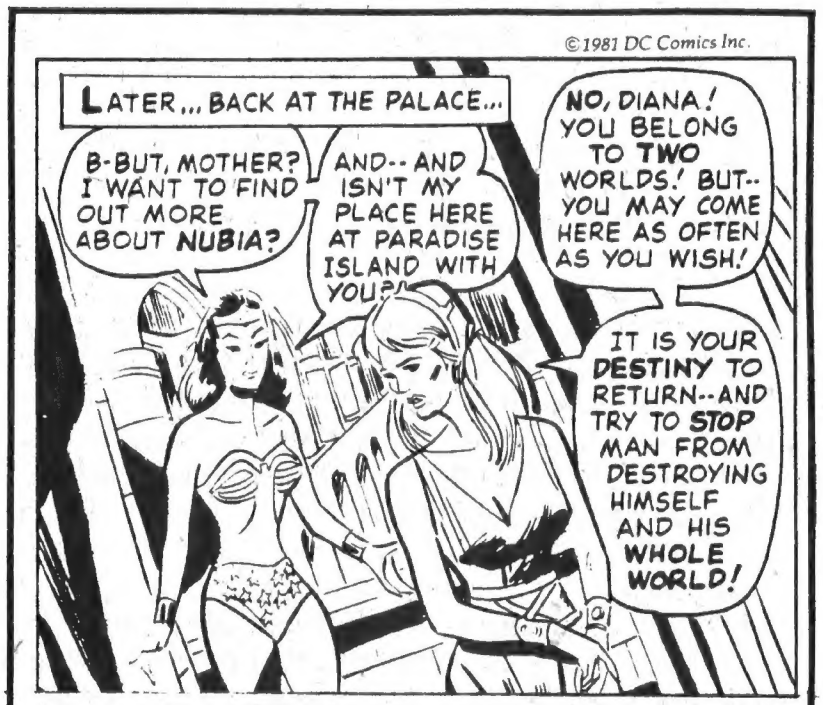
I found the articles informative, the criticisms con-

cise and constructive, and the insights...well, insightful. Kurt Busiek managed to bring into focus some aspects of my own Captain Universe character which I myself felt had been handled fuzzily. I hope the good Captain gets a second shot at a comics career so that I can sharpen the concept.

Keep it up... but, for heaven's sake, change that **logo!**

But why, Bill? Yours is the only complaint so far, and you didn't tell us what you didn't like about it.

As regards your general enthusiasm for LOC, we're quite grateful, though. The distinction between criticism and muck-raking (except in extreme cases) is sometimes not all that great—and we're attempting to be provocative without being abrasive. And as you noted yourself, sometimes our critics can bring into focus some of the aspects of a strip or series the presentation of which even the series' writer himself was not completely satisfied with. Glad to have been of service.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LATER... BACK AT THE PALACE...
B-BUT, MOTHER? I WANT TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT NUBIA?
AND-- AND ISN'T MY PLACE HERE AT PARADISE ISLAND WITH YOU?
NO, DIANA! YOU BELONG TO TWO WORLDS! BUT-- YOU MAY COME HERE AS OFTEN AS YOU WISH!
IT IS YOUR DESTINY TO RETURN--AND TRY TO STOP MAN FROM DESTROYING HIMSELF AND HIS WHOLE WORLD!
Wonder Woman's creed

We're building up a sizeable stock of letters, and we can't wait to print them. Next issue will feature, along with our regular columns, a large "Signed, Sealed, and Delivered" section. Have you told us what you think about LOC? About LOC's topics? About LOC's writers? What would you like to see LOC tackle? Our writers are always looking for ideas, after all.

And hey, once you've isolated that comics-related topic that's so near and dear to your heart—think about writing about it yourself. Who's going to say it better?

Visit the land of Letters!

LOC needs your ideas and opinions. After all, YOU know what you think about comics, but WE don't. This is YOUR chance to let fandom in on your opinions and ideas on comics. Pick up your pen TODAY and WRITE!

In LOC #2, Murray Ward's "MY Heroes Don't Do That" column recounted an editorial meeting between Jim Shooter and Chris Claremont concerning the fate of the Phoenix character. It has been brought to our attention that it was not made sufficiently clear that that conversation was a re-creation of the original meeting, based on accounts given by both Shooter and Claremont at the convention Murray attended.

LOC apologizes for any misunderstanding that might have arisen due to our oversight.

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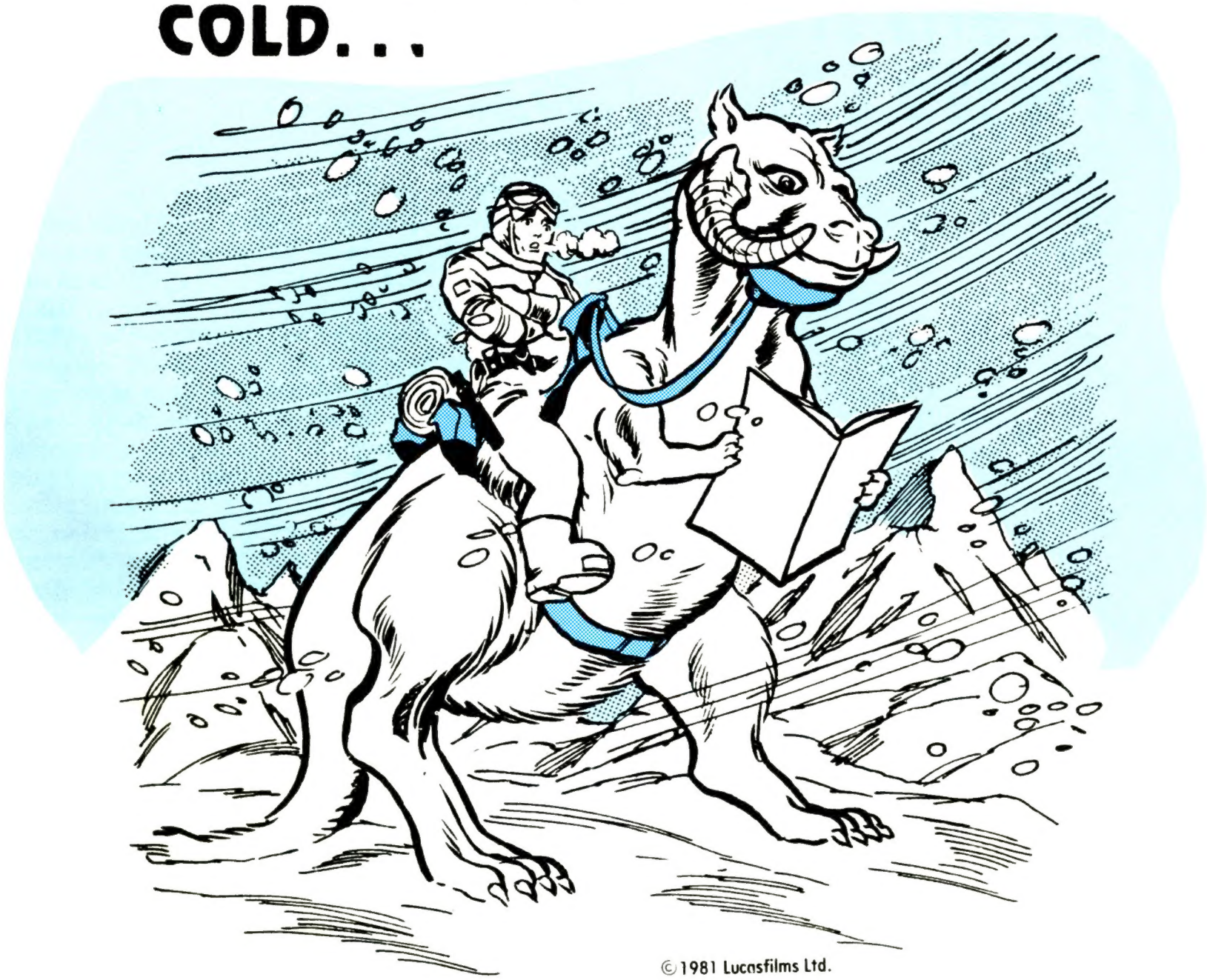

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